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OF THE

REV. THOMAS HOUSTON, D.D.

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WORKS

DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL

OF THE

REV. THOMAS HOUSTON, D.D.

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WORKS

DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL

OF THE

REV. THOMAS HOUSTON, D.D.,

KNOCKBRACKEN.

In Four Volumes.

VOL. II.

YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS.

THE FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING.

EDINBURGH:

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1876.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	1
CHAPTER I. Baptism: Doctrines which it exhibits, Privileges involved in it, and Duties to which it obliges, .	10
II. Conversion: its Nature, Necessity, Means, Evidences, &c.,	28
III. Profession of Religion: its Necessity, Nature, and Value,	57
IV. Character befitting those who have made a Pro- fession of Religion, and who have been at the Lord's Table,	97
V. Social Relations, and Influence of the Young upon Society,	159
VI. Preparation for Death,	236

THE FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING.

INTRODUCTION,	269
CHAPTER I. Communion of Saints,	277
II. Institution and Nature of Fellowship Meetings— Obligations to their Observance,	284
III. History of Fellowship Meetings,	305
IV. Subjects of Christian Intercourse in Fellowship Meetings,	324
V. Advantages of Social Converse and United Prayer, .	341
VI. Rules for Organizing and Conducting Fellowship Meetings,	360
VII. Concluding Considerations and Encouragements for the Observance of Fellowship Meetings, . .	379
APPENDIX,	389

I.

YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS :

OR,

*THE YOUTH OF THE CHURCH INSTRUCTED IN
THE DUTIES OF PRACTICAL RELIGION.*

PREFATORY NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE first edition of this work was speedily exhausted ; and copies having been sought for a considerable time past, both in this country and America, the publisher, to meet an increasing demand, has been induced to issue this second edition.

At the time the work was passing through the press, the Author's engagements, in connection with the Theological Seminary, prevented him from making some alterations which he had contemplated. He has, however, added a section on the Obligations of the Church to provide a succession of able ministers, and on the duty of Christian youth to devote themselves to the Ministry of the Word. This subject, all-important, whether viewed in relation to the present paucity of labourers in the spiritual harvest, or to the future extension of the Church and the conversion of the world, would require a much fuller elucidation. Could the Author command leisure, he would regard it as a special duty to furnish a work on the Call to the Ministry, its objects and ends, the necessity of providing faithful labourers, and the preparation required for the ministry at a period so pregnant with warning and encouragement.

A preface to the work when it was first published, by the late venerable Professor Symington, was given in the second edition. The greater part of this "*Recommendatory Preface*" is given in the "Opinions of the Press," at the end of the Volume. It was spontaneously furnished as the sheets were printing ; and discovers at once the comprehensive mind and loving heart of the writer, with the deep and prayerful interest which he ever manifested in the labours of the ministry, and in the welfare of the rising generation. This excellent man has since ceased from earthly labours, and has entered into his glorious reward. While his memory will be long fragrant with many who enjoyed the benefit of his invaluable

instructions, and witnessed his lovely example, the Author will always esteem it a high privilege to have enjoyed endeared fellowship with one so worthy, and to have received his commendation, so readily given, to this humble attempt to benefit the children of Zion.

Regarding the Redeemer's claims upon the young at the present day as peculiarly solemn and urgent, and in view of their precious opportunities, high privileges, and manifold dangers, the Author offers them these instructions, with the fervent prayer that, through the Divine blessing, they may, surpassing their fathers, be a seed to serve the Lord that shall be reckoned to Him for a generation.

KNOCKBRACKEN, *December 1856.*

NOTE.

IN issuing this *Third Edition* of "YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS," the Author is most deeply impressed with the conviction, that one of the most urgent and important duties of the Church in the present day is to give all attention to the training of the young; and to excite to earnest, persevering prayer on behalf of its baptized youthful members. The united petition of all who would desire to witness the spread and power of true religion should be—"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children."

July, 1876.

YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS.



INTRODUCTION.

THE class of persons for whose benefit the counsels contained in the following work are chiefly intended is, in many respects, interesting and important. In allusion to the natural divisions of the year, the season of youth has been commonly designated "the springtime of life"—the period of bud and blossom ; and according as it is cultivated or neglected, so will be the summer and autumn—the character of manhood, and the fruit of old age.

The young of the Church are objects of paternal affection and anxiety. They have received, in unconscious infancy, the seal of the Christian profession, and have been dedicated to God. Upon them the Church's hopes centre ; and on them, in a great measure, it depends what shall be the character of her future membership : whether she shall decline or advance ; whether Mount Zion shall appear most beautiful, the joy of the earth, or become desolate and forsaken, as an object "whom no man seeketh after." Prayers have been offered on their behalf at the mercy-seat. The heartfelt supplications of parents have covered their cradle, and followed them still as they advanced through infancy and youth ; and others, too, who are acquainted with the way to the throne of grace, have not failed to plead frequently and fervently in behalf of the rising generation. Instruction on subjects the most momentous and important, relating to their duty and responsibility,—their conduct and future destiny,—have been given them, or are in reserve for them. Their privileges are among the highest and most valuable that human beings can enjoy on earth. Occupying a station so eminent, and possessing advantages so distinguished, it may reasonably be expected that the youth of the Church should excel others in all that is praiseworthy and virtuous. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required ; and to whom men have committed

much, of him they will ask the more.”¹ Even the infidel and irreligious readily observe the deportment of the young of Christian families; and by means of it, there will either be extorted from them a testimony in favour of true religion, or they will be greatly confirmed in ungodliness.

The class of youth to which we refer are, moreover, exposed to numerous dangers, some common to them with the young in general, and some peculiar to them, as, by designation and profession, separated from the world, and as being members of Christian families. These arise from the pleasures, engagements and pursuits of the world, the temptations of the Evil One, and the constitutional tendencies, frames, and habits of their own minds. On every side, indeed, they are beset with multiplied and diversified dangers, all the more potent that the young are too frequently unconscious of them, and are ever ready to risk, in their own unaided strength, the encounter with evils to which tens of thousands have before fallen victims. If they become the prey of temptation, they will inflict upon the cause of Christ a double and treble injury. Religion will, through them, be wounded in the house of her friends. Adversaries will be confirmed in their opposition to the truth, and will learn to blaspheme; and the young, who furnish the occasion for such reproach, will find the return to the path of virtue and integrity beset with innumerable, and, not unfrequently, insurmountable difficulties. In general, the recovery of such young persons is all but hopeless; and early neglect of religion brings in its train loss of reputation, profligacy, and misery in this life, and ruin irretrievable in the world to come. “*The children of the kingdom shall be cast out.*”

On the other hand, the piety and steadfastness of the youth of Christian families are followed by eminent advantages to themselves, and are of singular use to others. The graces of Christian character appear peculiarly lovely and attractive, when they are seen subduing youthful lusts, and expanding and triumphing under temptations. Early devotion to the service of God will ensure opportunities of spiritual benefit and usefulness unknown to others; and from such an example, many will discern the beauty of holiness, and be animated and encouraged to walk in wisdom's ways.

The importance of enlisting the youth of the Church early in the work of religion cannot be too highly estimated; and, to a great extent, it has been sadly overlooked. Zion's children are

¹ Luke xii. 48.

committed to Christian parents to nurse them for God. In a solemn religious rite, they are publicly dedicated to the service of the Church. They are placed under the special care of ministers and office-bearers of the Church, and rendered objects of concern to all the members, that they may enjoy betimes the benefits which true Christianity confers,—may exhibit the transcendent excellence of the Christian character, and may have peculiar advantages for the great and honourable work of serving God in their generation. When it is, furthermore, considered that a large proportion of the young die before they reach the years of mature manhood—one-half of the human family being removed, as it is estimated, before the eighteenth year, and one-third of the remaining half before the fortieth,—how important that the young should be early taught to put their hand to the Lord's work. How desirable and valuable are the fruits of early piety !

The *advantages*, too, of beginning early a course of decided and devoted service of religion are manifest, when it is contrasted with engaging in such a work in mature life, or in old age. The young will thus be preserved from the sins of youth,—they will be kept from the path of the destroyers, and be saved many sources of painful future regret and bitter reflection. Surrendering their youthful energies to the God of their life, with spirits buoyant, and hopes ardent, they will know the pleasantness of the ways of wisdom, and taste, with a keener and purer relish, the elevated enjoyments of true religion. With the characteristic devotion of youth to a favourite pursuit, and their ready engagement in it, regardless of toil or danger, whether apparent or apprehended, what blessed results may be anticipated from the young engaging early in a course of devoted and sustained religious effort ! Soon as Zion shall have “the dew of her youth,” a “willing people” shall come to the King,—volunteers in his service,—shining in “the beauties of holiness,” as well in the lustre of a holy character, as in works of distinguished excellence and usefulness.¹

The Church has much to learn on the subject of training youth to the work of religion ; and the young themselves, who are the Church's foster-children, need to be aware of their weighty and manifold obligations. In no merely human profession or pursuit do men rest satisfied with employing in it only those who, without previous training, have arrived at middle life, or who are advanced to old age. The child and

¹ Psalm cx. 3.

the boy are educated for the avocations of mature age ; and it is always regarded as a peculiar advantage to have youthful activity and energy enlisted in a chosen pursuit. The youthful recruit makes the most courageous and persevering soldier, while advanced years disqualify for embarking in military service. And in almost every other profession, it is universally admitted, that if youthful ardour is cooled before entering upon it, some of the principal motives to exertion will be wanting ;—a high measure of success is hardly to be expected, and many advantages are lost, which future application and industry, in ordinary circumstances, are inadequate to recal. Religion is truly the business of life,—not a work only to be engaged in when the person has tried the polluted pleasures of sin, or experienced “the vanity and vexation” of the world, or when the things of time are receding from the grasp. It must not only mingle with all our pursuits, but it must be our first work, and it should direct, control, and sanctify every other. The Church is placed in the earth to reflect the glory of her adorable Head,—to expend all her resources in doing his work in the world,—and to be the divinely appointed instrument of bringing the world itself into willing subjection to Immanuel. For such an honourable office, who may be expected to be better prepared than the dedicated youth of the Church? Hers it should be to train them to the service, and betimes to enlist them in it ; and parents, ministers, and all the lovers of Zion should regard this as a principal part of their own special and paramount duty. The young should esteem it as their highest honour and privilege to “yield themselves to God,” and voluntarily separating themselves from others,—as in their infantile consecration they were distinguished from the rest of the world,—to array themselves around the standard of the Captain of salvation, nobly and courageously to fight the good fight, and to lay hold on eternal life.

Our own day especially imposes peculiar obligations upon parents, and all the guardians of youth, to train them for active labour in the Redeemer’s vineyard ; and loudly calls upon the young themselves to come forth to “the help of the Lord against the mighty.” This is an era of excitement, activity, and promise. On the one hand, there are temptations, most powerful and insidious, presented from various quarters, to lead away the youth of the Church from religion, and to render them inefficient of good in society, or positively pernicious ; while, on the other, there are calls to important public

duty, and opportunities of usefulness offered, such as no former age presented. Satan, the arch-deceiver, plies all his policy to mar or pervert the work of spiritual instruction in Christian families ; and the engagements of the world—the unsanctified literature of the day—careless companions, and the pleasures of sin,—are baits, alas! too successful, to ensnare unsuspecting youth, and to mislead them to ruin. “One sinner destroys much good.” A single young person, who has been religiously educated, thus perverted, by his example encourages others in carelessness and neglect, draws them into sin, and affords a triumph to the enemy, great as it is melancholy. Would we not be ignorant of Satan's devices,—would we defeat his designs,—we must pray and labour, with all fervour and diligence, that the children of Zion may be preserved from the path wherein destroyers go ; and we must constantly aim to engage them early and fully in the consecration of all their talents to the Lord's work.

For the prosecution of this service, how many favourable openings are everywhere presented in our day ! A perishing world demands our prayers, and our united and increasing exertions. The great cause of Christian missions—yet in its infancy, but every succeeding day pressing its claims more urgently upon the Church—requires multitudes of labourers, both at home and abroad ; while for the work of scriptural education, and the revival of godliness within the Church, there is indispensable need of a machinery far more powerful, and more extensive than that which has hitherto been employed. Pecuniary means—though these are valuable in their place—are less required than active and devoted labourers. The Church is enjoined by her Divine Head, to pray that the “Lord of the harvest” would “send forth labourers into his harvest,” because “the harvest is plenteous, and the labourers are few.” The answer to this important petition would be found in many active and faithful men, willingly giving themselves to the work. Whence are we to expect a supply of such labourers ? Is it not from the baptized youth of the Church—from those who were solemnly dedicated to God and his service in infancy, and who have been taught by Christian parents to regard it as their highest honour and privilege to act in accordance with this early consecration ?

Called, as the Church now is, to a great work, fitted to command all her resources, and to enlist all her energies,—loudly invited to “enlarge the place of her tent,” and to “stretch forth

the curtains of her habitation,"—and placed, as it seems likely she is, on the margin of great trials,—she should consider it a principal object of concern to employ the young committed to her care in the work of faith and labour of love. Parents should learn not only to bring up their children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord," but to train them less for themselves and the world, and vastly more for God's public service. Ministers and public men in the Church should diligently search for useful labourers among those whom Zion's King has entrusted to them as objects of solemn and prayerful interest. If "the signs of the times" have any meaning,—if they speak to us any definite language of direction or warning,—they unquestionably admonish us to be especially attentive to the youth of the Church; to prepare them for work and for trial, and to expect future blessing, in a great measure, from such instrumentality.

The young, too, must be brought to feel that on them centre high hopes and manifold expectations. Theirs it is early to give themselves to the Lord. When the Church invites,—when parents, ministers, and prayerful men are awakened to an earnest concern about them, and the cry of perishing multitudes from every quarter addresses them, "Come over and help us,"—they should cheerfully respond to the invitation, and say, "Here are we, send us." The future destinies of the Church are, as far as instrumentality is concerned, in a great measure, in the hands of the young. The spread of the truth—the victories of the faith—the upbuilding of Zion—are to be accomplished mainly through their holy example, consecrated zeal, and sustained activity. "*It shall be done in thy son's days.*" The present generation, there is ground to fear,—because of their lukewarmness, indifference, and worldly spirit,—will not be honoured to build a house for the God of Israel. How elevated the distinction assigned to the youth of the Church! How noble the position to be occupied by our sons and daughters, if they shall be called to perform the work to which the prayers of the faithful, in many lands, and for many ages, have been directed,—the prospect of which strung the harps of ancient seers, and gladdened the hearts of martyrs of the Lamb; the full completion of which will cause all heaven to resound with triumphant hosannahs of joy and thanksgiving! And whether or not the rising youth entertain the hope that they shall share, in this world, in the triumphs of the Redeemer's cause, they should never doubt that their early devotedness shall, to themselves and others, be most salutary and beneficial. What

a happy means of revival would it be to see the young of Christian families shining in the beauties of holiness, and yielding themselves as ready instruments for the advancement of godliness! What a powerful confirmation would this furnish of the truth and excellence of Christianity! What extensive benefits might result from youthful faculties and energies applied to the undivided service of Him who is unspeakably the best of masters!

The design of the following work is to supply instructions which the Church, it is presumed, would address to her sons—earnestly concerned for their welfare, and anxious that they should be the “repairers of the breach,” the “restorers of paths to dwell in.” It aims to excite the young themselves to recognize the paramount claims of the Redeemer’s service, and to enlist them betimes in the noblest of all enterprises. Of the Church adorned with the garments of praise, and rejoicing in her King, it is declared—“INSTEAD OF THY FATHERS SHALL BE THY CHILDREN, WHOM THOU MAYEST MAKE PRINCES IN ALL THE EARTH.” The happy effects are,—the perpetual memorial of the Saviour’s name, and the nations of the earth brought to celebrate his praise: “I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.”¹ To subserve this high purpose,—to elevate Zion’s sons to be “princes in all the earth”—and thus to cause the Redeemer’s name to be remembered in all generations, and to lead the nations to praise Him,—the writer willingly assumes the office of a monitor to youth. The children of the Church, he may be allowed to say, without affectation, have long been to him objects of special and solemn interest. They have had a share in his daily pleadings at the mercy-seat. A considerable proportion of his public labours has been devoted to their moral and religious training; and a principal desire of his life has been to lead “the generation to come” to know “the testimony and the law which were left in Israel”—that sons should arise and declare them to their children—and that one race might praise God’s works to another, and declare his mighty acts. He would desire to remember frequently the command, “FEED MY LAMBS,” and to regard obedience to it as a principal evidence of love to the Saviour. Happy would he consider himself, if any hints that may be suggested were blessed as the means of conducting the feet of youth from the ways of folly into the paths of virtue and peace.

¹ Psalm xlv. 16, 17.

To the youth of the Church, he would, with all humility and freedom, dedicate this feeble attempt for their benefit. These counsels, however scattered and desultory, come to you as the fruit of anxious solicitude for your welfare. They are the results of some experience of the dangers to which you are exposed, and of the excellence of the cause which is recommended for your adoption; and they are offered to you with earnest prayers that they may be blessed as a means of moulding your character and regulating your lives.

We are desirous, dear youths, to lead you into the ways of virtue and happiness. We present to you objects of the purest and holiest ambition, whose very pursuit is ennobling, and the attainment of which will constitute the most glorious reward. We would engage you in a cause that may be at once profitable to yourselves, and advantageous to others,—a cause intimately connected with your own happiness for time and eternity, and in which you will be acknowledged as benefactors of your species, and may, during your lives, and long after, be the dispensers of innumerable blessings to the human family.

You will not despise, or pass unheeded, these admonitions, because they may appear to you too serious for opening hopes and buoyant spirits. Subjects that relate to the habits and pursuits of life,—that embrace the great interests of the immortal soul—that concern the prosperity of the Church, and the honour of religion—that have an immediate bearing upon a death-bed and the destiny for eternity,—should surely not be shifted aside, because they may be presented in a manner that may tend to repress youthful volatility, and to induce serious consideration. It is better now to reflect and ponder, and even to suffer pain, from serious consideration, than to rush heedlessly on danger, and to plunge thoughtlessly into irreparable ruin. 'The young may not unsuitably be addressed in the words of an English statesman.' "While we laugh, all things are serious around us. God is serious, who preserves us, and has patience towards us; Christ is serious, who shed his blood for us; the Holy Spirit is serious, when He strives with us; the whole Creation is serious, in serving God and us;—all in heaven and hell are serious;—how suitable then it is for man to be serious, and how can we be gay and trifling!"

'The words which we utter are those of a friendly monitor. They are more. So far as they accord with the Scriptures of truth, you should regard them as the word of Christ Himself.

¹ Sir Francis Walsingham.

They come to you, accompanied with a voice from the "excellent glory," expressive of all duty and all privilege : "This is my Beloved Son—hear Him." If all must give an account of their stewardship, and if every talent must be rendered back to Him who entrusted it to us, then may we not doubt that by these words hereafter you shall be judged ; and according as you obey or neglect them, shall, in some part, be your future destiny,—inconceivable felicity, or everlasting misery. May we, therefore, urge you *now* to ponder, reflect, and practise? Here are presented to you subjects of solemn habitual reflection. We aim to furnish to you right views of your relations to God and his Church ; of the claims of Christ's cause ; and of your future hopes and prospects. On every topic we suggest to you the practical improvement. These are the counsels of the wisdom that is from above, and in following them you will reap a great reward. "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." "I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness."¹

In the words of an eloquent American writer, we solicit, in conclusion, your serious prayerful attention to the matters embodied in these counsels :—

"Religion is not a subject to be trifled with; it is not a subject to be rejected with aversion or dislike. It comes to you as a message from heaven; it comes clothed with the authority of heaven's King; it comes to make you holy and happy; to raise you into a resemblance to your Creator, and meetness for his presence; and it is your highest interest, as it is your most important duty, to welcome this religion to your bosom, as the sweetest solace of life, and the richest inheritance of the soul."²

¹ Proverbs viii. 10, 11, 17, 18.

² *Lectures to Young Men on the Formation of Character*, by Joel Hawes, D.D., p. 57.—Glasgow Edition, 1833.

CHAPTER I.

BAPTISM.—DOCTRINES WHICH IT EXHIBITS—PRIVILEGES INVOLVED IN IT—AND DUTIES TO WHICH IT OBLIGES.¹

THE youth of the Church have been introduced to her fellowship by the simple and significant rite of Baptism ; and it seems proper to refer to the nature, obligations, and privileges of this ordinance, as, when rightly understood and improved, it is fundamental to future godly practice, and spiritual blessing.

Baptism has been well defined to be “a sacrament, wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s.”² Appointed by the blessed Redeemer, as a badge of discipleship, and as the introductory ordinance in his Church, it is replete with spiritual meaning, presenting, in an affecting manner, an exhibition of the cardinal doctrines of the glorious Gospel. External symbols, addressed to the different senses, teach more forcibly than words that are merely spoken to the ear. They are the natural way of communicating knowledge, while written language is the artificial ; and by impressive representations, as in a well-executed picture, they exhibit great truths, and important facts, in a manner more striking than could be effected by any description, however lengthened or particular. Divine wisdom is apparent in the two symbolical institutions of the New Testament. They are few in number. The one is the initiatory rite, the other a standing means of nourishing up saints to the

¹ The Author had originally designed a much fuller discussion of the topics contained in this chapter than that which has been given in the text : but he reserves the greater part of the matter for a Brief Practical Treatise on Christian Baptism, designed both for Parents and Children—a work, which, notwithstanding the various valuable doctrinal and controversial treatises which have been published on Baptism, appears to him yet to be a desideratum in the Church. This work has been issued, with the title, *A Practical Treatise on Baptism*, and is printed in Vol. III. of these Works.

² Westminster Assembly's *Shorter Catechism*.

stature of perfection in Christ Jesus. The simplicity of both ordinances, while it gives evidence of their Divine origin, renders them admirably adapted to the capacity of persons of every condition in life, and of every grade of intellect; and we cannot conceive of means that could be devised more suitable for inculcating the most important truths, and of promoting their continuance and diffusion throughout the world.

SECT. I.—*Doctrines exhibited in Baptism.*

The existence of Baptism, in different ages, and in all parts of the world, proclaims the Divine authority of the Church's exalted Founder: it displays, at the same time, other vital doctrines, in the most natural and impressive manner. The grand fundamental article of all revealed religion—the doctrine of the Trinity—is strikingly exhibited by the application of water to the body, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and so long as the Saviour's parting commission to his apostles shall be executed, in the case of every person who is baptized, will the Church present a solemn public testimony to the cardinal scriptural truth—the plurality of Godhead in unity. The great propitiation made for sin by Christ's death, and evidenced by his resurrection, is not obscurely shadowed forth by baptism. On the eve of his crucifixion, He himself spoke of his death in terms that obviously referred to this ordinance: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"¹ The apostles repeatedly speak of being "baptized into Christ's death," and of being "buried with Christ in baptism,"²—thus teaching, that the ordinance may be regarded as an exhibition of the all-important fruits of the Saviour's death, burial, and resurrection from the dead.

Not only are the great objects of Christian faith symbolically exhibited in Baptism—the principal doctrines of *subjective* religion are vividly represented and impressively taught in this ordinance. To believers, it presents a lively emblem of the *remission of sins* and the *cleansing of the soul* by the blood of Christ, and of its renovation by the Spirit of God. In other words, it shadows forth, by the simplest images, *fellowship with Christ in his death and resurrection*, with all the blessed consequences that result from it here and hereafter. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were

¹ Luke xii. 50.

² Rom. vi. 3, 4; Col. ii. 12.

baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life." "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." These comprehensive declarations evidently imply, that while Baptism assumes as fundamental the doctrine of *human depravity*, and would be destitute of all proper meaning, if this cardinal article were denied—it symbolically and figuratively represents the great doctrines of regeneration—justification through the righteousness of Christ—adoption into God's family—the mortification of sin—obedience of life—brotherly love—with future victory over death and the grave, and a glorious resurrection.

The *commencement of religion* in the soul in regeneration is represented by this ordinance. Hence, in obvious allusion to Baptism, we are said to be "born of water and of the Spirit,"² and to be "saved by the washing of regeneration."³ Its *progress* is marked by the same expressive symbol. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."⁴ "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it, with the washing of water by the Word."⁵ And its glorious *completion* is thus also exhibited, "The like figure whereunto even baptism also doth now save us."⁶

Of these great truths, Baptism is a lively *representation* and seal—by it they are exhibited, and to believing subjects they are confirmed and ratified. Most evidently, it is not the blessings themselves, but an appropriate and significant *symbol* of them. The washing with water is not regeneration and the renewal of the Spirit, but a sign of these important changes. It were obviously absurd to affirm that any external ablution can purify the heart and conscience; and incontrovertible facts declare that to many who have been baptized, the ordinance has been unproductive of any saving benefit. An unholy life is the sure evidence of an unrenewed heart. Baptism is, however, a divinely instituted sign of union to Christ. It denotes fellowship with the Church of the redeemed, and participation in the nature and privileges of the children of God. It is the recognized badge of a public profession of religion. Christians are thus taught to regard one another as brethren,

¹ Rom. vi. 3, 4; Col. ii. 12.

² John iii. 5.

³ Titus iii. 5.

⁴ Gal. iii. 27.

⁵ Eph. v. 26.

⁶ 1 Pet. iii. 21.

and as united in promoting His glory, by whose holy name they are called.

Baptism *ratifies* Divine truths to the heirs of salvation. Like the *seal* attached to a public document, so Baptism confirms to God's people the faithful word, that their sins are blotted out, and that those who have been forgiven shall never come into condemnation. Baptism, moreover, as the badge or symbol of a profession, is an act of *solemn dedication* to Him in whose name we are baptized. It was customary of old for soldiers, when they took up the standard of their general, and vowed allegiance to him, to be marked with his name. So our baptism is a profession made in the most solemn and explicit manner, that we shall follow the Captain of salvation—fight under his banner, resolutely oppose his enemies, and be ever jealous of his honour. From Him it is the visible sign of accepting us as professed followers and soldiers. We are hereby devoted to the blessed Godhead ; and we profess publicly to take God the Father as our Father—God the Son as our Saviour and Friend—God the Spirit as our Sanctifier and Guide—and God, in Trinity, as our sure and everlasting Portion.* And while Baptism is an act of solemn worship and dedication, it implies that blessings are sought and expected from Him whose name is named upon us. It is resignation to Him as the source of all blessing, and it is an important means of blessing to those who are the predestined heirs of salvation. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." "According to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."²

SECT. II. — *Privileges enjoyed through Baptism.*

This ordinance confers on its subjects benefits excellent and distinguishing. Of these we notice a few.

First. Baptism brings with it *recognition of membership in the Church*. The children of Christian parents baptized in infancy, are not thereby *made* members of the Church. They were so previously, from connection with their parents ; and in right of

* "The ordinance itself is a professed dedication to God, or an acknowledgment that the person baptized is obliged to be the Lord's ; and signifies his right to the external blessings of the covenant of grace, which are contained in the Gospel dispensation."—*Kidgely's Body of Divinity*, p. 601.

² Mark xvi. 16 ; Titus iii. 5.

the profession of their parents, they are entitled to its privileges. Baptism is the visible means of recognition. The Abrahamic covenant, to which circumcision was appended as a sign and seal, included parents and their children, and the promise which guaranteed the enjoyment of special privileges, extended to both. The same covenant, under a different administration, and having now for its visible seal "the washing with water," is still the great charter of all blessed privileges. The application of the seal is the public badge of recognition, just as, in written documents, the signature of the hand and the impression of the seal, imply a transference of obligation or privileges; and as in affiliated associations, the introduction of a member is connected with the giving of a sign or badge, by the possession of which the individual is then and afterwards recognized as entitled to the privileges of membership. Thus, by Baptism, we are publicly recognized as pertaining to Christ's Church—the most excellent society on earth—to which belong all gracious and enduring blessings. The visible badge, or seal, does not of itself or of necessity confer these excellent benefits; but it is the sign and expression of our faith and hope that these blessings shall be bestowed. With this object, the person baptized is devoted to God; and with this view, he receives the token of brotherhood.

Secondly. Baptized youth become, by their baptism, *objects of special concern to the Church.*

Children thus privileged are to be regarded as disciples in Christ's school—weak, it is true, and yet unfit to appreciate the advantages of such a relation, but still, as disciples, having the right to claim them as theirs, and possessed of a title to their full inheritance. Christian parents give a public pledge that everything shall be done that is possible, on their part, to bring them to Christ, and to rear them for glory. The acceptance of this pledge by ministers in dispensing Baptism implies that the Church willingly recognizes the dedication, and consents, as a nursing mother, to regard the little ones thus surrendered to her tutelage as objects of special interest and concern. They have a claim upon the *prayers of God's people*, and they actually enjoy them. The Church, both by its officers and members, owes them counsel, reproof, and exhortation. Fellowship with the faithful is to them, even in infancy and childhood, a privilege of the highest value. They are hereby brought into near contact with the conversation

and example of the saints,—“the excellent of the earth,”—and enjoy the best means of forming a holy character, and of being prepared for eminent usefulness and happiness. In all the prayers which are offered by the godly, in behalf of the visible Church, baptized children have an interest; and they share in efforts which are the fruit of the spirit of prayer, and that relate to the future increase and prosperity of Zion.

Thirdly. *The young, in such circumstances, are interested in all the privileges of the visible Church.* Christian parents, in Baptism, avow their expectation that their children shall enjoy the full privileges of the Church of Christ. These are partly external and partly internal and spiritual. To the Church are secured, by her Divine Head, a ministry appointed by Himself, ordinances of worship as means of salvation, constant preservation, and peculiar protection.¹ The visible Church includes the invisible; and these outward privileges become, through the blessing of Christ, the means of conveying spiritual and eternal blessings to the heirs of salvation. To them pertain the covenant, and all its blessed provision, and they have the right and title to Christ, and all the benefits of salvation. While it is freely admitted that all who are baptized are not made partakers of these privileges; yet all such are specially called to their enjoyment, and have the means by which they may come to their actual possession. They are given up to God, in the hope of obtaining them. They are led to the margin of “the wells of salvation;” and while, from the earliest period of their existence, they have admission to holy ordinances, they are thereby conducted to the channels through which flow the precious blessings of everlasting salvation. The children of the Church’s members are regarded as “not unclean, but holy.”² They are separated, dedicated ones. The outward privileges to which Baptism introduces them, are more valuable than those which pertain to any other community on earth. When these are viewed, as in ordinary cases they should, as the heaven-appointed means of conferring saving benefits, we cannot estimate too highly the advantage of the condition into which the rite of initiation in the Church brings its objects.

Lastly. *By Baptism, the most solemn guarantee is given for the religious education of the youth of the Church.*

Infant children are offered to the Church as disciples, and in their baptism they may be said to be publicly entered in Christ’s school. Parents, in presenting them before the Lord, engage

¹ 1 Corinthians iii. 21, 22.

² 1 Corinthians vii. 14.

that "as long as they live," they "shall be the Lord's,"—they vow to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."¹ Could there be a higher or more sacred pledge given for their instruction in the things of salvation? Parental concern for the welfare of children, elevated and strengthened by the sanctions of religion, a solemn vow made before many witnesses and ratified by the impressive symbols of redemption, with the united prayers of God's people,—in these circumstances, baptized infants are dedicated to God and offered to the Church. If obligation to duty is felt in any case, surely it may reasonably be expected, that here it will exercise a powerful and permanent influence. The value of early religious education can never be too highly appreciated. It moulds the character, fits for extensive usefulness, preserves from the path of the destroyer, and frequently confers blessings for time and eternity, not on the individual alone, but upon others through his instrumentality. Baptized youth enjoy all suitable means of training for God and happiness; while the moral and religious instruction of others is neglected, and they are schooled for the world, initiated in the ways of sin and folly, and conducted into the paths that lead to destruction. How vast the distinction! How great and valuable the privileges which the youth of the Church have, in the pledge given in their baptism, for their religious education!

SECT. III.—*The Duties implied in Baptism.*

It is related of Cotton Mather, that he was accustomed frequently to give thanks to God for his baptism; and that he often referred to his early dedication to God, as a motive to diligence in Christ's service. The duties to which baptismal consecration obliges may indeed be regarded as embracing the whole course of Christian obedience. The Westminster Divines, in answer to the question—"*How is Baptism to be improved by us?*"—say in the 167th, in the Larger Catechism—"The useful, but much-neglected duty of improving our baptism is to be performed by us all our life long; especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits confirmed and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking con-

¹ 1 Samuel i. 28; Ephes. vi. 4.

trary to the grace of Baptism, and our engagements ; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sins, and of all other blessings, sealed to us in that sacrament ; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace ; and by endeavouring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body." From this comprehensive summary, it will be readily seen that due consideration of our baptism may minister the most useful instruction, and subserve the most important purposes. Hence may be drawn motives to humility, spiritual comfort, brotherly love, and the assurance of hope. From reflection upon their baptism, the young may be led to cherish a sense of Christian obligation to all duty, and may derive incentives to universal holiness. Among the duties that are especially incumbent upon baptized youth may be mentioned—*serious and frequent reflection upon the baptismal vow ; striving after conversion to God ; early active engagement in Christ's service ; mortification of sin, and prizing and seeking early all the benefits of the covenant of grace.*

The young who have been dedicated to God should early *consider their ways.* They should inquire into the nature and design of Baptism itself, an ordinance so well fitted to instruct them in matters of the highest moment, and so interwoven with their future history and destinies. It reminds them of their original guilty and depraved condition, and of their need of Christ's blood for pardon and cleansing. It teaches them that they are under the curse, till they are renewed in the spirit, and obtain internal baptism—the circumcision of the heart. It exhibits the necessity of separation from the world, and the excellence of connection with the household of faith. It imports an open surrender to the Lord, and is a sacred bond laid upon the young to be wholly and for ever his. Baptism is a symbol of regeneration. Without reference to this great internal change, the ordinance is destitute of meaning, and the application of the outward sign is useless. The young should begin betimes to ponder the solemn question,—whether they have been "born of water and of the Spirit," or whether they are yet dead in trespasses and sins. They should plead with God that, as by their baptism they became *professedly* his, they may, by regeneration and adoption, become his in *reality.*

They should consider seriously the evidences of regeneration, and never rest satisfied till they feel that with them "old things are passed away, and all things have become new." By Baptism, children are lent to the Lord, and pledged to serve Him in newness of life. The highest honour on earth is to be a faithful servant of the King of kings. To this honourable service, Baptism calls its subjects. The Hebrew servant, who loved his master and refused to leave him in the year of release, had his ear bored through with an awl, at the door-post, and remained a perpetual servant to that master. Infant Baptism may be viewed as subserving a similar purpose. At the door-post of wisdom's house, the baptized child is pledged to loving obedience to Christ, and though unconscious at the time, he is a pre-engaged servant of the Lord of the house. So soon as judgment comes into exercise, he should recognize the obligation, and willingly prefer the service of Christ to that of every other master. In the spirit of joyful devotedness, he should welcome the service, "Here am I, Lord, send me,"—"I am thy servant, Lord, thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid." The *whole life of faith* may, in fine, be promoted by duly considering the baptismal engagement. Devoted to the Saviour in infancy, we should yield ourselves to Him, and live to Him alone. Awakened to a sense of the incomparable value of spiritual blessings, the baptized youth may plead his baptism as furnishing a plea and claim for the actual enjoyment,—"'Lord, I am thine, O, save Thou me.' I have been devoted to thee. Divine goodness has, in a wondrous manner, distinguished my lot,—provided for me an ordinance in which I was pledged to be thine,—brought to the fellowship of thy people, and presented in infancy with all saving benefits in Christ. I cannot doubt that the God of all grace was sincere in applying these precious blessings to me in sign and symbol; that, as He has no pleasure in the sinner's death, so He really declared his design that they should be mine in full and everlasting possession. This early dedication I venture to plead, on the footing of my Saviour's merits. 'I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.'"¹ Baptism, thus viewed, supplies constant and powerful *motives* to the cultivation of brotherly love, and the practice of universal holiness. Christians are baptized by the Spirit into "one body."² If partakers at all of the spiritual blessings signified by Baptism, we are members of the invisible Church, of which Christ is the glorious Head.

¹ Psalm cxix. 176.

² 1 Cor. xii. 13.

Baptism, like circumcision of old, is a *family ordinance*, and in its mystical import, it seals to the happy union and communion of "the household of faith." What a motive is thus presented to cherish love and good-will to all who are partakers of the "one baptism," and who are members of the "one body!" Having early named the name of Christ, we should *depart from all iniquity*. The washing with water directly refers to the grand and only means of moral purification, the blood of the Lamb. Whence can we educe a stronger motive to urge to universal holiness? What ordinance can more suitably and impressively teach us to purify ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; and to anticipate that blissful state, when we shall be presented to the Lord, "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing!"

SECT. IV.—*Early recognition of Baptism.*

The early recognition of Baptism is among the first duties required of the youth of the Church. It implies *a sense of the obligation of baptismal vows, and acting under such an impression—giving one's self to the Lord—renouncing the ways of youthful sins and vanity—and entering decidedly upon a religious life*. As these topics will be illustrated in subsequent portions of this work, we deem it sufficient, for the present, to advert to them only in the way of general reference. A solemn vow to be for God, and for no other, rests upon every Christian child. Ignorance of it is, in every sense, melancholy,—betraying the natural blindness of the mind in relation to matters of the highest concernment. Neglect of it, when known, is deeply criminal,—discovering the enmity of the heart against God, and manifesting deplorable ingratitude and rebellion. Nothing is more lovely than a young person early feeling and acknowledging the weight of the vow of God upon his conscience. The language of his heart should be—"I am thine, save me." "*Thy vows are upon me, O God.*" By voluntary surrender, he should make his own what has been promised on his behalf; and esteem it his highest honour, as well as his paramount duty, to yield himself to the Lord. The impression of the baptismal vow, settled upon the mind, would propel to holy action. To withhold from God the *first fruits* of youth, is to rob Him of what He claims by a special propriety. On the other hand, the conviction habitually cherished that we are God's will supply a most

powerful motive to pure and devoted conduct. It will lead to relinquish youthful follies, and guard against wicked companions; and inspiring early the consciousness of the dignity and responsibility of an immortal nature, it will impel to choose the pleasant ways of celestial wisdom.

This is obviously the import of the grand scriptural counsel to the young—"REMEMBER NOW THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH, WHILE THE EVIL DAYS COME NOT, NOR THE YEARS DRAW NIGH, WHEN THOU SHALT SAY, I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THEM."¹ This is in effect saying—"Think early on God your Maker. Consider his incomparable excellency, and his glorious perfections. Reflect on his distinguishing and manifold goodness to you above others. Remember the obligations of gratitude by which you should be impelled to live to his glory—of his law, by which you are bound to serve Him—of his Gospel, by which you are called to love Him supremely. Remember vows which are properly your own, by which you have been dedicated in soul and body to the Lord. In the days of your youth,—the springtime of your existence, hopes and joys,—cherish this as a subject of devout and continual remembrance." The precept does not mean a mere exercise of memory, or occasional reflection. It is the remembrance which leads to decisive action that is enjoined. It bids to remember and turn to the Lord. It requires this to be placed as the first inscription upon the inner man. It is the *memory of the heart and conscience*, which should employ the mind daily, mingle in all our designs and pursuits, and direct, control, and actuate the whole conduct.² These dispositions the young should aim to possess and cultivate, "before the evil days come." Such remembrance will be a

¹ Ecclesiastes xii. 1.

² "Remember thy Creator."—"Remember Him as the great Author of your being; and spend not the existence which He has given, and which He every moment sustains, in forgetfulness of Him, and rebellion against Him. Remember your unceasing dependence upon Him for life, and breath, and all things; and cherish the humility that becomes dependent creatures. Remember Him as your All-bountiful Benefactor, both in providence and redemption, the Father of mercies, the God of salvation. . . . Remember Him with the dispositions, the worship, the service that are due to Him. It is affectionate, reverential, practical remembrance of Him that is here recommended. Think how awful it is, that God should be so generally forgotten by his intelligent offspring; that He should have so few of their thoughts, so little of their regards! Dare ye to be singular, by devoting yourselves to God in a world where He is so grievously dishonoured, where there are so few hearts that give Him a welcome residence. Choose ye his love as your portion, his service as your employment, his glory as your end."—*Wardlaw on Ecclesiastes*, vol. ii. pp. 265, 266.

preservative from the paths of folly. It will be the best preparation for days of trial. And in a season when the spirits are buoyant with new-born hopes, and the heart is alive to pleasure, and prospects of enjoyment swell the bosom, the remembrance of God as our Benefactor, and Sovereign and Portion, and the cherished impression of our engagement to be his, will impart a new zest to every lawful pleasure, and add a keener and purer relish to every lawful enjoyment.

The *motives* that should constrain the youth of the Church to recognize early their baptism, and enter decidedly upon a religious life, are manifold and powerful. The following may, when duly considered by the young, be instrumental in leading them to choose the ways of godliness.

1. *The responsibility of baptized children is peculiarly solemn and weighty.* God's rule is *the law of retribution and proportion.* Privileges enjoyed in youth—opportunities for knowing and doing the will of God—are talents of the most valuable kind, and these bring with them the highest responsibility. The young have been born in the Church of Christ, they were baptized as a means of introducing them to all the privileges of disciples,¹ they have been taught to read the Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation; they have heard the preaching of the Gospel, been joined with professed Christians in the hallowed exercises of worship, and been separated from a wicked world. Upon the accountability arising from such multiplied and eminent advantages, the children of the Church should frequently and deeply reflect. Should they disregard it, they may be assured that it is not for a moment overlooked by Him who so distinguished their lot, and who will be their final and inexorable Judge. In the "book of his remembrance," all their privileges, as well as all their actions, are faithfully recorded; and in this world and the next, the award will be in proportion to the improvement or neglect of the talents with which they have been entrusted. Their ruin will be tremendous, if they refuse to consider these things. They will "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath." Life will pass away unblest. They will lie down in their grave, their "bones full of the sins of their youth." Their state in

¹ The Saviour's commission to his ministers—"Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them," &c.—properly signifies, to "*make disciples*," and intimates that baptism is the appointed ordinance, by which individuals are enrolled among the disciples of Christ, that they may be trained for his service—by which they are entered into the school of Christ, as professed subjects of spiritual instruction.

the judgment will be terrible—their future torment inconceivably fearful—and all will be aggravated from the consideration of what they were, what they enjoyed, what was done for them from their earliest years.

2. *The sin of deferring to recognize baptismal engagements is manifold and aggravated.*—One of the most common and powerful temptations that assail the young, is that of deferring the business of religion till a future period. They look to others. They entertain the idea,—so congenial to the natural heart,—that to be devoted to religion is incompatible with the enjoyment of pleasure. They wish to have mirth and happiness, without the restraints of religion. They are deterred through shame ; and on various other grounds they procrastinate. All this is exceedingly evil in itself, and is frequently followed by consequences the most injurious. It implies disregard to God's authority ; it plainly indicates the prevailing love of sin ; it discovers contempt of the obligations imposed in Baptism ; and it perils the momentous interests of the soul and eternity upon an uncertain future. The depravity of the nature, if not early checked, gathers strength and vigour with our growth. The mind speedily loses its delicacy of sentiment and feeling ; conscience becomes callous, and the heart is hardened. First warnings unattended to, and early counsels disobeyed, the heart becomes less susceptible of receiving right impressions ; and the way is opened for throwing off entirely religious restraints, and for launching away into a career of folly and dissipation. Repentance and conversion become more improbable the longer they are deferred ; and facts, numerous and solemn, declare that when first calls are unheeded, and first impressions stifled, the hope of salvation becomes every day more uncertain ; and the individual given over to lusts, on the gratification of which the heart was bent, is left to become a formalist, or a hypocrite, and at last is given up to utter rejection. When the means of grace are faithfully dispensed, the greater number of those who are converted are awakened in youth. If under the faithful preaching of the Word, and the enjoyment of other privileges, the young do not soon profit, there is strong ground to fear that they may not profit at all. In the ministry of the apostles, wherever abundant success followed their labours, it was chiefly the fruit of first efforts ; and when this was not enjoyed, the servants of God generally directed their steps to another place, indicating that the rejection of their message exposed those to whom they were sent to be left in confirmed rebellion and ungodliness. So, we have reason to

fear, not a few baptized youth are given up, for resisting first impressions, and neglecting to make an early improvement of their distinguished privileges. Indeed, it can hardly be expected to be otherwise : for it would be difficult in words to declare all the evil of the young refusing to recognize their baptism, and postponing the personal application of the things of salvation. They may never have another season ; and they certainly will never have a better. Many, who like them procrastinated, remain till their final account, impenitent and unpardoned, to bewail throughout a lost eternity their contempt of God, and their neglect of salvation. Their sin is most displeasing to God. It is virtually saying to Him, "Depart from us ; we desire not the knowledge of thee." We will go on sinning for a time, and then, when we are tired of the service, we will repent and reform. We will abuse the mercy and forbearance of God, to reject his claims to the homage of the heart and life, and to do service to his great enemy ! Can such a spirit and conduct possibly escape the vengeance of the Almighty ?

3. *Innumerable advantages accrue from the early recognition of the baptismal covenant.*—To the young, decision in religion is of inestimable value. It fortifies the mind against temptation, moulds the character, and gives a proper bent to the pursuits of life. It purifies and elevates the heart by bringing into nearer intercourse with the best and most glorious of beings ; and it thus serves to raise the youth to the conscious dignity of an immortal creature. Spiritual as well as temporal blessings are enjoyed in the way of decision and devotedness in religion. The divine assurance is ample and all-encouraging—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."¹ Deliverance from a state of indecision and irresolution is itself no mean advantage. And to be brought in contact with the friends of God, to enjoy an interest in their prayers, and to realize their fellowship, and to be led, through intercourse with them, to the contemplation of heavenly objects, and to the holy services of religious worship, are benefits which the young can never too highly appreciate. The young become useful by becoming pious. None others "serve their generation," but those who, devoting their hearts and lives to religion, serve it "by the will of God." The decided piety of children is the highest comfort and honour to Christian parents—it gladdens

¹ Matthew vi. 33 ; 1 Timothy iv. 8.

the heart of ministers, and cheers the faithful and the aged, who prefer the good of Zion above their chief joy. It powerfully confutes the cavils of infidels, and silences gainsayers; and not unfrequently it has proved a blessed instrument of revival to the Church.

4. *Substantial and lasting pleasures result from the early recognition of Baptism.*—The desire of happiness—natural to every human being—is especially powerful in youth. The young universally pursue after pleasure, as, with spirits lively and passions warm, they are fitted to enjoy it. Without attempting to enumerate the elements of human happiness, it may be assumed, as a fundamental maxim, that, *true religion is peace, comfort, and felicity; and that separate from it, there is nothing that deserves the name of happiness.* It is not merely that it alone reveals a state of bliss in the world to come, and conducts to its sure enjoyment—it discovers the only way to substantial consolations and holy joys in this present earthly condition. It prevents the countless miseries which come upon those who disregard its claims; it alleviates outward trials, and enables its possessor to rejoice even in tribulation. It cures the evils of the heart, by subduing and eradicating those disorderly passions and inclinations which create so much dissatisfaction and misery in human society. It confers the “witness of a good conscience.” It provides mental pleasures of the highest kind, by presenting to the mind objects of contemplation, the most excellent and ennobling. Its consolations under sorrow, disappointment, and bereavements are effectual to relieve and cheer the heart. They are balm to the wounded spirit; and like the source whence they spring, they are pure, unfading, and eternal.

5. The *privileges* which true religion confers are most valuable. Peace with God and the enjoyment of his favour—union to Christ—an inheritance with them that are sanctified—these are privileges which transcend all our present conceptions. True religion implants in the heart *spiritual graces*, and these become sources of unspeakable pleasure. “The water,” says the Saviour, “which I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up to life everlasting.”¹ Faith realizing things invisible and eternal; hope, like a star, illuminating scenes of darkness, and pointing to a glorious heaven; love, centered upon objects the most exalted, delighting in God, acquiescing in the perfect wisdom of his dispensations, grateful

¹ John vii. 37.

for countless benefits, and rejoicing in his salvation; and repentance, patience, meekness, temperance;—all these are as purifying streams issuing from an inexhaustible fountain of grace in the heart, and flowing forward to the ocean of endless felicity.

The *duties* of religion, too, bring with them diversified and exalted pleasures. Praise is comely and pleasant for the upright. Prayer is the calm rest and satisfaction of the heart, revealing its wants, cares, desires, to One who will assuredly hear, and who is ever ready to answer. The reading of the Scriptures, hearing the Word preached, the holy rest of the Sabbath, admission to the Lord's table, participation in social and domestic worship, are exercises suited to the rational and spiritual nature—exercises which refine, and satisfy and enoble—which, while they contribute to form a holy character, prepare for higher, even heavenly enjoyments. The assurance, too, of an interest in the love of God, and the hope of future glory, which true religion brings in its train, delight and satisfy the heart. Animated by such joys, the evils that afflict humanity are felt to be indeed "light and momentary." As to the Israelitish Lawgiver, when on Mount Pisgah, the wilderness is forgotten, and the eye rests with unmingled delight upon the ineffable pleasures of the heavenly country—the land of promise. These pleasures never satiate nor weary. Neither the world nor any enemy can take them away. They are a healing medicine for every wound, and a balm for every woe; and they are continually augmented, as the capacity for relishing and enjoying them expands. They are pleasures for life; they yield solace, support and triumph in death; and in the future state, they become "*rivers of pleasure, and joys at God's right hand for evermore.*" Such is the happiness which religion holds out to the young, as it invites them to its service. "Length of days" is in wisdom's "right hand, and in her left riches and honour." Should not the baptized youth of the Church early make these pure and unalloyed pleasures their own? Happiness here and hereafter depend upon their choice; the earnest in time will be followed by eternal and unchangeable felicity.

6. *The examples of many honoured servants of God* should excite and encourage the young to recognize early their baptismal dedication.

Many whose names are recorded in the Book of Life enjoyed the benefit of parental dedication, and willingly

devoted themselves early to the service of God. The largest number of those whose lives and characters are depicted in the Bible as servants of God, and who were eminent instruments in advancing the Divine glory, were thus distinguished. Of these, Moses, Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Obadiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, in the Old Testament, and John the Baptist and Timothy, under the New, are exhibited as illustrious examples of youthful piety—remarkably blessed themselves, and singularly useful in their generation. In all ages, since the introduction of Christianity, it is evident that a peculiar blessing has rested upon the lives and labours of those who, early recognizing their infantile dedication, have yielded themselves to the Lord. Numbered with these were many of the illustrious reformers and martyrs of Christ, and some of the most devoted missionaries, who have carried the Gospel to the perishing heathen. The names of Guthrie and Rutherford, of Cargill and Renwick, and of many others of the covenanted confessors and martyrs of Scotland, will live enshrined in the hearts of all who value the cause of true religion and civil liberty; and of these it is recorded that they enjoyed faithful parental training, and were remarkable for youthful piety.¹ Richard Baxter, Philip and Matthew Henry, and a great number besides of the Nonconformists of England, are instances of singular usefulness, in connexion with early devotedness. Elliot and Mayhew, and the Mathers of America, are a part of the same great “cloud of witnesses.” Who has not heard of Pearce, and of the family of the Janeways, who gave themselves to God in childhood—who were honoured to do much for Christ’s cause in a short time, and whose works, though they are dead, will always speak? Brainerd—the most prayerful and devoted of missionaries, whom God honoured with eminent success—and Edwards, his biographer—one of the greatest of uninspired men,—in early life dedicated their heart and life to God; and even before they had passed the years of boyhood, exhibited fruits of wisdom and piety, which have seldom been equalled, and never surpassed. The “Resolutions” of Jonathan Edwards, prepared when he was but twenty years of age, deserve to be frequently pondered and adopted as rules of conduct for the young. How admirable the spirit which the following express, and how worthy of imitation!

“Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God’s glory, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the

¹ See *Scottish Worthies*, *passim*.

whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved, to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved, to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever.

“Resolved, to be continually endeavouring to find out some new invention and contrivance to promote the fore-mentioned things.

“Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God ; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.

“Resolved, never to lose one moment of time ; but improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

“Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.

“Resolved, never to do any thing which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

“Resolved, never, henceforward till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's.

“Resolved, constantly, with the utmost niceness and diligence, and the strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have truly an interest in Christ or no ; that when I come to die, I may not have any negligence respecting this to repent of.

“Resolved, very much to exercise myself in this all my life long, viz., with the greatest openness I am capable of, to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to Him, all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, everything, and every circumstance.”¹

May the youth of the Church be led by the Spirit of all grace to follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises ! May they choose early that best part, “which shall not be taken from them !”

¹ *Edwards' Life and Diary*, in his *Works*.

CHAPTER II.

CONVERSION—ITS NATURE, NECESSITY, MEANS, EVIDENCES, ETC.

THE importance to all of a great spiritual change is frequently declared in the Scriptures, and the passages which speak on this subject are among the most pointed, explicit, and solemn in the Sacred Volume—"Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." "So then they, that are in the flesh, cannot please God." "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature ; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." *

These are the solemn testimonies of God that cannot lie—of Him who knows what is in man—at whose tribunal every human being must one day compear—and whose judgments, we know assuredly, will be according to truth. They are spoken of all without exception. All have sinned and have come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. Every individual must be translated from a state of guilt and sin to a state of holiness, if he would escape the tremendous wrath of the Eternal, and partake of the Divine favour here, or obtain happiness hereafter. These, and like scriptural declarations innumerable, represent human beings as aliens from God, and exposed to his indignation, until the state is altered, and the heart renewed ; and they assert, in the most unequivocal terms, the importance of a spiritual renovation of the heart, towards the enjoyment of God's favour, or of aught that can be

* Heb. xii. 14 ; Ps. ix. 17 ; Eph. ii. 1 ; Rom. viii. 8, 9 ; Gal. vi. 15 ; John iii. 3 ; Matt. xviii. 3 ; 2 Cor. v. 17.

regarded as a real blessing. It is, moreover, very evident that that change, whatever it is, is something quite different from mere external reformation, and vastly superior to it. It would be a gross abuse and perversion of the scriptural declarations we have quoted, and others that refer to this subject, to apply them to a mere moral and external reformation—to the exchange of one set of opinions for another, or to an alteration of conduct which a person has it in his own power to effect, or that may be effected by external circumstances or agencies. The Scriptures term this change a *new birth—a passing from death unto life—a new creation—a resurrection*. Such strongly figurative expressions are devoid of all proper meaning, if conversion only intends an outward moral reformation. It is comparatively easy to exchange one sin for another; and many circumstances may serve to displace one set of habits, and to induce another. Foolish notions may be given up, evil practices may be laid aside, and many external duties may be performed. The outward demeanour may be becoming, and the conduct praiseworthy; and yet there may be no change of heart—no conversion. To use the language of one of the old writers, "*a man's sins may forsake him, and not he his sins*." The love of sin may still predominate within—the heart may be wholly a polluted fountain—and the motives of a course of conduct that is of good report among men may be corrupt and perverse.

The language of the Word implies something altogether different from a mere visible or partial reform. It asserts the necessity of an internal, total change. It speaks of a change of heart, expressively and frequently entitling it a "new heart," a "heart of flesh"—and, in terms that cannot be misunderstood, ascribes it to supernatural agency, asserting or implying that it is beyond created power to effect it. While our baptism points to this great change, and the Sacred Scriptures represent it as fundamental and essential to the possession of all spiritual blessings, it concerns us deeply to reflect on its paramount importance to ourselves. To all, the momentous inquiry should be frequently brought home,—Enjoying the outward seal, have I really partaken of the washing of regeneration? Have I passed from death to life, or am I still under God's fearful wrath and curse, dead in trespasses and sins? One thing is needful, and till the spiritual change of which we speak has been experienced, it can never be rightly known or secured. May the young seriously lay to heart this subject! May each reader feel the infinite importance of settling now the great

question, whether he is in Christ, or is yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity!

To guide to a right decision upon this all-important topic, we shall explain briefly the *nature* of the great *Change*; advert to its *necessity*; notice the *Means* whereby it is ordinarily effected; and state a few of its more obvious and distinguishing evidences and effects.

SECT. I.—*The nature of Conversion.*

The conversion of a sinner is the turning of the heart from sin to holiness, and from the dominion of Satan to the service of the living God. It is a real internal change, affecting the whole inner man, altering the bent of the thoughts and inclinations, and imparting a new and spiritual direction to the desires and affections of the heart. It is a complete revolution of the moral nature. It comprises a change of views, and a transformation of character, in which the person who was previously at enmity with God, disregarding his authority, hating his perfections, and the slave of sin, becomes at peace with Him, the object of his love—the Lord's freeman. It is accompanied by an alteration of state, in which the condemned criminal becomes a pardoned subject and an adopted son. Instead of hardened impiety or thoughtless folly, godly contrition takes possession of the heart. Unbelief gives way to confiding trust and dependence; love instead of enmity prevails within; and in the room of aversion to things spiritual and divine, a new relish is implanted, which can only rest satisfied with its appropriate objects,—the things of the Spirit of God,—the things that pertain to everlasting salvation.

The phrases whereby this moral change is designated in the Sacred Volume, when duly considered, are fitted to guide to a right apprehension of its nature. It is the taking away of a "*hard and stony heart*," and the implantation of a "*heart of flesh*." This work, it is evident, is in all respects far above created power. Accordingly, three times in a single verse, God claims it as his exclusive and glorious prerogative: "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." The former condition, the natural state, is most significantly termed "a hard and stony heart,"

¹ Ezekiel xi. 19.

the person unrenewed being insensible to the things of God,—the great matters of sin and salvation, of God's glory and eternity, and the affections being cold and lifeless, in relation to all spiritual objects. In conversion, instead of "the hard and stony heart," there is given a "heart of flesh." Life is implanted, and thenceforth the person is distinguished by spiritual feeling and motion. Bring him to the concerns of God's glory, and he feels ; to sin, his own and others', and he is affected ; to Christ and his salvation, and new and warm desires actuate the soul ; and to the duties of holy obedience, and he is compelled and drawn by a constraining, irresistible influence. His heart is "enlarged," and he runs in the way of the Divine commandments.¹ And as the heart in the physical system controls and directs the chief vital functions, so in the great spiritual change, the implantation of a new heart is equivalent to a renewal of the whole man : it alters completely the current of the thoughts and desires, moulds the character, and impresses a new bent and direction on the whole life and conduct.

It is again termed *regeneration*, a new birth, and the person changed becomes a new creature : "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ;" "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature ;" "Being born again, not of corrupt seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."² Here, again, God is distinctly revealed as the Author of this change, since He alone who gave man existence at first, can bring into being a new creature. As in the natural birth no new matter is produced, but all its capacities and senses are new, conversant with new objects, and suited to the new state into which it has entered ; so in the spiritual change, the individual is the same, but he is a new man, possessed of new capacities, perceptions, dispositions, and prepared to make a new use of all his faculties. He is introduced to a spiritual world, and becomes capable of enjoyments and satisfactions, to which he was before an entire stranger. As the formation of the fœtus in the womb is beyond the power of human comprehension, so the manner in which the new nature is implanted transcends human knowledge. As the birth of the human infant precedes the exercise of its faculties, and is the necessary introduction to all the actions of the future life, so the new birth is indispensably requisite to the performance of all spiritual actions, to all works that are morally good and acceptable in the sight of God. This is the starting-point of a spiritual

¹ P's. cxix. 32.

² John iii. 3 ; 2 Cor. v. 17 ; 1 Peter i. 23.

existence ; and just as the members of the new-born infant are weak, though all the parts of a perfect man are present, and increase by nourishment and exercise, so the new creature, feeble and imperfect at first, advances in the Divine life until he arrives at the "stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus." Without this change, no human being, however gifted with natural or acquired abilities, can see the kingdom of God. He cannot discern its spiritual nature, or the excellency of its blessings, and he can have no relish for their enjoyment.

Conversion is likewise styled "*newness of life*"—a "*passing from death unto life*"—a *resurrection*—a "*new creation*."¹ Still the grand leading idea is, that God alone, who works all in all, can effect it, since these great operations—infusion of life, quickening the dead, and creating anew—are the sole products of Divine almighty agency. How complete and wonderful is the change ! Where death reigned before, and corruption held undisputed sway, a spiritual existence is conferred, the grave of a natural state is opened, and the dead are awakened to life. With new-born powers and faculties, they are introduced into a new world of spiritual existences. Rescued from death, they become the servants of their glorious Deliverer. They are put in possession of powers and dispositions, of which they were before wholly unconscious. The law of the new nature is the law of gratitude and devotedness. They are required henceforth to "*walk in newness of life*." "*Risen with Christ*," they seek "*the things that are above ;*" and as alive from the dead, they "*yield themselves to God*," and "*their members as instruments of righteousness*."²

The change is, moreover, an alteration from a state of moral and spiritual *darkness* to the *light* of spiritual knowledge, and holiness, and comfort. The regenerated are delivered from "*the power of darkness*," and brought into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The natural state was one of deep ignorance and total blindness. The "*god of this world*" had blinded the minds of them that believe not ; and of all that is most important for them to know they were completely ignorant. By the work of the Spirit of God, the shades of night are parted, and the "*dayspring from on high*" visits the soul. The subjects of his gracious operation become the children of light. God, who "*made the light to shine out of darkness*," has shined into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in

¹ Ephes. ii. 10 ; Romans. vi. 14 ; John v. 24 ; 1 John iii. 14 ; Ephes. iv. 24.

² Col. iii. 1 ; Rom. vi. 13.

the face of Jesus Christ." Spiritual discoveries may be at first dim, and many clouds may for a time obscure the vision; but the least in the renewed family is enabled in some measure to say, "WHEREAS I WAS ONCE BLIND, NOW I SEE." They never return to a state of complete darkness again. The spiritual views imparted are *humbling, sanctifying, refreshing, and increasing*. "*The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*"¹ In fine, this important change is described as a becoming *spiritually*, instead of *carnally* minded; laying aside "the old man and his deeds" and "putting on the new man;" renouncing the service of Satan and sin, for the blessed freedom wherewith the Son makes his people free. The natural state is one of total depravity, in which the love of sin predominates. The understanding is darkened, and the heart and conscience are defiled. The "prince of this world" reigns in the hearts of the children of disobedience. The habitual bent and inclination of the mind and heart are towards the objects that gratify the flesh. In love with sin, the person is the slave of sin. He is led captive by the destroyer at his will, and he serves divers lusts and pleasures. The strength of corruption in the heart is like a *law* constraining obedience—like a cruel and despotic master, compelling his slaves to fulfil his pleasure. In the great spiritual change, the enmity is slain—the old man is laid aside—the bent of the mind becomes spiritual, and the person experiences that to be "spiritually-minded is life and peace." By the grace of the Saviour and the energy of his Word, the individual becomes "free indeed." "He is the freeman, whom the truth makes free." The services of sin and Satan are felt to be intolerable slavery, and are renounced for ever. The dominion of the old man is completely broken; the new-born creature is enrolled among Christ's "willing people," that come to Him in the day of power. Joyfully accepting of Christ's yoke, he enters upon a service of love. He consents to the law of God, that it is holy, and just, and good. He "delights in it after the inner man," and says from the heart, "*Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.*"²

It will be obvious from these diversified scriptural representations, that as essential parts of regeneration, or as inseparably connected with it, are—

1. *New views* of things spiritual and divine—views not natural to any mind, nor acquired by the exercise of intellect, how-

¹ Prov. iv. 18.

² Isaiah xxvi. 13.

ever powerful or gifted. These views are spiritual, supernatural, and experimental. Sin is seen as odious and abominable ; the person regards himself as polluted, guilty and wretched ; God is beheld as infinitely excellent and glorious ; Christ as fairer than the sons of men, and altogether lovely, and salvation by Him as unspeakably valuable and all-desirable. The "light of the knowledge of the glory of God," let into the mind, attracts, subdues, and fills the heart, and presents spiritual and heavenly objects as interesting, lovely, and of surpassing importance.

2. *Convictions of sin, deep, heartfelt, and abiding.* When the Spirit of truth comes, "He convinces the world of sin." Through the law, by which is "the knowledge of sin," this blessed Agent not only shows the evil of sin in general, but brings home to the conscience a sense of the guilt and greatness, the defilement and misery, of his particular transgressions. He feels his own sins to be infinite in number and of fearful demerit. He is persuaded of the righteousness of the law in his condemnation. He is convinced of the heinous and aggravated nature of sin, as committed against God, his Creator, Preserver, and most bountiful Benefactor. He sees it in the glass of the Redeemer's sufferings ; and is taught impressively its evil character and tremendous consequences, in the groans and agonies, the sufferings and death, of God's well-beloved Son. The depravity of his nature, the multiplied transgressions of his life, his daily sins, and especially the sins of unbelief, appear before him in the darkest colours ; and convinced and alarmed, he cries out, "Lord, save me, I perish !" "What shall I do to be saved?" He obtains the spirit of the contrite ones. The hardness and impenitency of the heart are removed ; and he is given a heart which feels and bleeds for sin—"a heart of flesh." The spirit of a distressed penitent and returning wanderer is his : "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus ; Thou hast chastised me, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, and I was chastised ; Turn thou me and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God."¹ "I will arise, and go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight ; and am no more worthy to be called thy son."² Differences there are in the strength and continuance of such convictions in various individuals ; but in substance, they are the same in all who become partakers of the grace of salvation. All see and acknowledge the spirituality and extent of the Divine law—the reasonableness and justice of

¹ Jeremiah xxxi. 18.

² Luke xv. 14.

its claims, their own countless violations of its requirements, the guilt they have incurred, the righteousness of God in awarding the deserved penalty, and the unspeakable danger of endless misery. Under such views and feelings, the awakened sinner is led to despair of help or salvation in himself; and burdened with sin, and pressed with danger, he flees for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him in the Gospel.

3. *A new spiritual relish for spiritual objects.* This has been regarded by a distinguished writer as the substantial matter in conversion, as embracing the whole change.¹ Although we may hesitate to define this great change by this mode of phraseology, we admit at once that it always brings with it a new spiritual taste, and imparts to the inner man a relish with which before he was wholly unacquainted. Formerly he had no liking to God, no sympathy with his glory, no delight in his people, no desire after the blessings of his salvation, no love to holy ordinances. His desires were sensual, his inclinations carnal. He sought to gratify the lusts of the flesh. In Jesus Christ, he saw no form nor comeliness, on account of which he should desire Him. Like food put into the mouth of a dead man, or administered to a person in disease, spiritual things when brought near excited no appetite, or only produced loathing and disgust. In the renewal of the mind by the Spirit, the aversion of the heart to spiritual objects is removed, and a holy relish for spiritual objects is communicated. God is seen in his matchless excellency, and is desired, loved, and adored. Christ and Divine things become objects of intense interest, and of commanding attraction. A spiritual appetite is implanted, which cannot be satisfied but with spiritual objects. "My soul thirsteth for God, the living God." "The desire of our souls is towards thy name, and the remembrance of thee." "My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."²

4. *The reception of Christ into the heart, and reliance on Him as the rest and portion of the soul.*

Conversion is a turning from a state of unbelief to cordial trust and confidence. Christ Jesus is proposed as the only and all-sufficient Saviour, and is offered as a full and adequate supply for all the wants of the soul. He is a Physician, Shepherd, Husband, Portion. He is made of God unto us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." He is a covenant of the people—God's salvation—All and in all. Thus He is presented in gracious manifestation and offered to all

¹ Dr Dwight.

² Ps. xlii. 2; Isa. xxvi. 8; Ps. lxxxiv. 2.

who hear the Gospel. In regeneration, the Holy Spirit reveals to the heart the Saviour in these blessed characters and relations. Faith implanted in the soul credits the testimony which God has given of his Son, and embraces the Divine Saviour as He is offered. It looks to Him for deliverance and safety, flees to Him for refuge, and rests and feeds upon Him for all strength, and nourishment, and comfort. It is the *assent of the mind* to all blessed truths respecting Christ and his salvation, and the *confidence of the heart* in the person, promise, and righteousness of the Redeemer. This is so nearly connected with the great change of which we are speaking, that it is represented as an essential and primary element of it,—“*He that believeth hath everlasting life.*” “To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”¹ Faith is the first act of the new creature. In believing we live. It is the vital breath of the regenerated subject. “He that believeth shall never come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life.” Appropriating and cleaving to Christ, as the chief good, the person who believes has found the hidden “treasure,” and he is willing to part with all to enjoy it. From the heart, he says, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”² Henceforth he values the favour of his gracious Lord as better than life. He lives to please Him; and the grand desire of his heart, is to be conformed to his blessed likeness, and to be with Him, beholding and enjoying Him for ever.

“Thus faith is the cardinal virtue of the Christian—the root and stem of all graces; and till we believe, we are not converted; so soon as we believe according to his Word, we are converted. This is the kind of conversion which the Scripture enforces. When once the happy change has passed—and pass it must on all who would enjoy eternal life—the converted man feels like one translated out of darkness into marvellous light; a new world opens before him; a new object and end of life seems to have taken possession of him; a new and opposite direction is given to the energies of his soul; and now all his desire, all his anxiety, seems to be after that salvation, which before he neither sought, nor apprehended, nor valued.”³

This change, we need only further remark, in relation to its nature, is, besides being supernatural, *instantaneous, universal, and the commencement of all purity and excellence of character.*

¹ John iii. 36; i. 12. ² Ps. lxxiii. 25. ³ *Redford's Great Change*, pp. 6, 7.

Between death and life, there is no intermediate state. Whether convictions are powerful or weak, the change is effected in a moment. The soul spiritually dead before is quickened; in a "time of love" the Redeemer passes by, and says, "Live;" and the person instantly becomes a new creature,—“old things” passing away, and all things becoming “new.” It is *universal*, pervading the whole inner and outward man; affecting all the faculties, and impressing a new bent and direction upon the whole heart and life. The regenerate becomes “*a new lump*,” as they were previously “*unleavened*.” The conduct is effectually and thoroughly reformed, as the heart is renewed. The seed of holiness is sown in the heart and mind, and it cannot but germinate and bear fruit in the life and actions. Henceforth the individual is numbered with the saints of God. He is alive unto holiness, and he cannot but go forward to perfection, until he appears before the throne of God, completely transformed, shining in the beauty of holiness—without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

SECT. II.—*The necessity of Conversion.*

The indispensable need of this change to every human being who would enjoy happiness may be shown in various ways:—

First. *God has repeatedly declared it.* Three times in one discourse, in the space of a few verses of the same chapter, the Saviour, who is Truth itself, declared it,—“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;” “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;” “Ye must be born again.” These expressions are designed to have the largest latitude of meaning. “Except a man”—in the original it is “any one.” There is need to every person, young or old, whatever his previous character or habits, indispensable and urgent need, if he would possess God’s favour here, or come to his presence and glory hereafter, to be “born again.” In many other places of the Sacred Volume, God has asserted the same necessity. He has invited and commanded the sinner to turn from sin, or die; to repent or perish; to become holy, or underlie his wrath for ever, and be excluded from all the benefits that result from his favour. This connection God has established, and none can alter it. Let God be true, and every man a liar. He who

¹ John iii. 3, 5, 7.

is truth itself, and who can never repent or change, has proclaimed to all his creatures, without exception, that there can be no friendship between Him and the sinner unrenewed—that there can be no salvation without conversion.

Secondly. *The state of the sinner compared with the character of God*, absolutely requires this change. The descriptions of man's condition and character given in the volume of inspiration, are verified by universal experience ; and it need not be told how utterly contrary these represent the sinner to be to God. Sinners are estranged from the life of God, aliens from Him by evil works—at enmity with Him. God is “light,” while their understandings are darkened, and their hearts are blinded. He is love, and they are “hateful, and hating one another.” They are under the curse—loathsome, polluted, far from God, and far from righteousness. They dislike to retain God in their minds. They are “sensual, worldly, devilish ;” “carnal and sold under sin ;” and they “worship and serve the creature more than the Creator, who is God, blessed for ever.” This account is applicable not to a particular class of the unrenewed. However fair may be the outward aspect, and whatever diversity there may be in some adventitious circumstances, it is descriptive of the moral character of all natural men. Jew and Gentile are all under sin. Sinners remaining in this condition cannot possibly enjoy favour or fellowship with God. No law is more universal than this. Evil shall not dwell with God, nor shall fools stand in his sight. All sin, in any form, is held by Him in eternal abhorrence. The sinner must be completely changed ; his whole nature must be renewed, before he can have fellowship with God. The enmity must be slain—the rebel become a friend and an obedient son, before heaven's exalted Sovereign can regard him with approbation, or he can enjoy the precious fruits of covenant favour.

Thirdly. *There can be no holy character, and no holy conduct*, till the heart is renewed. An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit. A clean thing cannot proceed out of an unclean. The character accords with the nature ; and the actions of the life are consonant to the internal dispositions and principles. Unchanged, the sinner is unable to perform aught that is morally or spiritually good. He cannot even see the things of the Spirit of God, “for they are spiritually discerned.” In the words of an early Christian father,¹ the best actions of the unrenewed are but “splendid sins ;” or according to one of

¹ Augustine.

the articles of the Church of England, "Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of the Spirit, are not pleasant to God; forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or deserve grace of congruity; yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."¹ The tree must first be good, before the fruit can be good,—the heart must be made "good ground," before it can bring forth fruit to reward the cultivator, or repay the possessor.

Fourthly. Conversion is indispensable to a *happy death, and an entrance to heaven*. To the righteous, and to them alone, death is gain. The instances on record are not a few of the triumphant deaths of real Christians; the joyful exits of the unrenewed have yet to be written. Instead of these, many cases have been related of men of highly-gifted intellects, who were placed in the most favourable outward circumstances in life, shrinking from dissolution with horror, and passing off the stage of life in misery. Religion alone, real religion, which takes up its abode in the soul when the heart is renewed, and which expands and comes to maturity at death, can smooth a dying pillow, and make the last scene calm, peaceful, and triumphant. Nothing but a holy nature, it is obvious, can dwell in heaven. In the abode of perfect purity, into the immediate presence of Him who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," can no unclean thing enter. The sinner's nature unchanged is opposed to heaven and its exalted Sovereign. To suppose him to be admitted to heaven in this condition, would be to "suppose vice dwelling in the region of perfect purity; hostility to God, raised to the honour of immortal fellowship with Him; and deep, unsubdued, hateful depravity, reaping the reward of faith and love; and in association with all that is pure, glorious, and blessed."² Heaven would, indeed, be no place of happiness to an unconverted sinner. It is a universal law, that there can be no felicity where the nature and dispositions are not suited to the objects of enjoyment; and no full happiness can be partaken of which is not spiritual and holy. The unrenewed sinner in heaven would be out of his element. He loved not the Sabbath here, and how could he be happy in the eternal Sabbath-keeping of heaven? He had no pleasure in the saints; none in the work of praise, and the other varied exercises of religion; no

¹ *Articles of Church of England*, art. xiii. ² *Railford's Great Change*, p. 10.

fellowship with the righteous; no delight in drawing near God; and how could the songs of the redeemed, and their lofty communion, and the enjoyment of the God of their salvation, minister felicity? To a carnal mind, all the sights of heaven would be oppressive, all its employments a drudgery, all its diversified and overflowing pleasures only a splendid misery. The presence of God and holy angels would be full of torment; and the unholy creature would shrink instinctively, and in conscious wretchedness, from everything that is to be seen, heard, or enjoyed in heaven. Into a place of which holiness is the all-pervading element, and the summit of whose happiness consists in the cloudless vision and blessed fruition of God for ever, the unconverted sinner cannot enter. And it may be added, that the kindred element of the unconverted heart is the prison-house of sin, the abode of endless woe. By a law as firmly established, and as universally operative as the law of gravitation, sin and punishment, impenitence and destruction, are infallibly connected. Like a talent of lead, the hard and stony heart gravitates downward to endless misery. Sinners must repent or perish; the nature must be changed, or the individual be lost for evermore.

Fifthly. We only subjoin further, *That this great change must be accomplished in this present world; and it is most important that it be effected in early life.* Death produces no alteration in the moral condition or habits. The character in which we pass out of time will appear with us in the world of spirits, and will rise with us in judgment. It has been forcibly said to be "the dying dress of the soul, the vestments in which it must come forth to meet the sentence of an impartial Judge."¹ If, then, none can enjoy happiness without the possession of holiness, if none can enter heaven without moral purity, it is evident that the heart must be changed, and the life conformed to the image of Christ, before we die, else our hopes of future felicity are all a delusion. And as an approved character is gradually formed,—being the combination of right principles, and the cultivation of proper habits,—the fruits of a glorious change require to be brought forth and matured, to constitute a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. The season of youth is more suitable than any other for turning to the Lord, and for beginning to acquire this meetness. It is most reasonable to devote the spring-time of life to the service of the Author of one's being. The fervour of youthful affections employed in religion is as the incense of youth: and beginning

¹ *Hawes's Lectures to Young Men on the Formation of Character*, p. 46.

early to seek the Lord, a long day of active and honourable service may be realized; and the character formed by the combination of many holy elements, tested in trials, and matured by experience, will stand complete in all the will of Christ, and a greater reward be enjoyed in glory. Although God may call sinners at different periods of life, and send them into his vineyard, yet it may safely be affirmed that the most suitable for the work of conversion is the time of youth. Every call, every warning, every invitation, is eminently fitted to operate upon the young mind. The pleasures and advantages of religion are calculated to attract the young; the dangers of an unconverted state are to them peculiarly imminent; and the honour and rewards of a life of holiness are to them doubly and trebly enhanced. Let them begin, then, to seek the Lord early. Let them be serious, earnest, resolved on this subject. Let them see, above all, to have their calling made sure—their conversion to God ascertained, that they may be glad and rejoice all their days in God.

SECT. III.—*The means of Conversion.*

We proceed to notice some of the *means of conversion*. The Holy Spirit, the great Author of this change, acts in a sovereign manner, and divides to every one severally as He wills. Sometimes, in a sudden and extraordinary manner, He plucks brands out of the burning, arrests the sinner in his thoughtless downward career, and turns him to the Lord. The instances of the conversion of the apostle Paul, of Augustine, of Bunyan, of Colonel Gardiner, and John Newton, show how powerfully He can bring down the rebel, and how effectually He can draw the sinner with cords of love, and bands of a man. Even in these cases, we can discern a certain established order followed, and a regard had to means of Divine appointment, displaying the inscrutable wisdom, as well as the irresistible energy of the Almighty Agent. And in ordinary cases, it may be safely affirmed, that there is a settled way in which the Spirit performs his saving operations in the hearts of sinners, whatever circumstantial differences there may be in particular cases, with respect to the views presented to the mind, the strength of convictions, and the length of their continuance. Of the *means of conversion*, we mention—

1. *Faithful parental prayers, instructions, and examples.* These have been blessed in all ages to gather not a few into

the fold of Christ. The promise to the father of the faithful is especially addressed to believing parents and their children, "I will be a God to thee, and thy seed after thee." The God of Abraham still manifests a peculiar regard to those who by faith are the spiritual children of the patriarch. The dedication of their infant offspring He accepts; their prayers He hears and graciously answers. He accompanies their instructions with a blessing; and the holy and attractive examples of the life of religion which they presented to their children frequently become the means of impressing tender minds, of convincing them of sin, and of drawing them to the Saviour. It is probable that not a few of the youth of the Church, who become monuments of mercy, are thus led to Christ, and thus become partakers of the blessings of salvation. How should such a consideration impel parents to all diligence, and urge them to show all fidelity in the performance of their momentous duties! And how forcibly ought it to press upon the children of godly parents the inquiry—What has been to them the fruit of faithful parental training; and whether their conversion to God has been the result of the eminent early advantages which they have enjoyed?

2. Serious solemn *consideration* is rendered by the Spirit a means of conversion. Naturally, all sinners are thoughtless, and make "*light*" of the great concerns of the soul's salvation. While they remain in this state, all the means of conversion must prove unavailing. Warnings pass unheeded; calls and invitations are disregarded; promises allure not; and the awful realities of death and judgment and eternal salvation produce no deep or lasting impression upon the heart and conscience. God's counsel to the sinner is, "Thus saith the Lord, *Consider your ways.*"¹ And we are assured that such consideration is indispensable to the turning of the heart to God, and that it always precedes it. The awakened sinner is led to reflect upon his former case, his state of mind, his habits of life. He is brought to consider his accountability—his guilt and fearful danger. Thus is he led to desire deliverance from "the wrath to come"—to appreciate the excellency and value of the salvation that has been provided, and to "flee for refuge" to the hope of the Gospel. The prodigal, when he "came to himself," reflected seriously on his perishing state, and on the plentiful and happy condition of the men of his father's house,—"How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"² The awakened on

¹ Hagget i. 7.

² Luke xv. 17.

the day of Pentecost, considering their manifold sins, aggravated by their rejection and crucifixion of the Saviour, cried out,—“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”¹ And the Philippian jailer, under a similar state of thought and feeling, exclaimed, “What shall I do to be saved?”² The language of the Psalmist is truly applicable to all convinced sinners without exception, and aptly describes the progress in the work of conviction till it issue in conversion,—“*I thought on my ways, and turned my heart unto thy testimonies.*”³ The Divine Spirit, working conviction and leading to solemn reflection, discovers former courses to be rebellious, sinful, ruinous. The sinner sees that his sins are more numerous than the hairs on his head,⁴ and that each one of his transgressions has incurred God’s righteous indignation, and has exposed him to his infinite wrath and curse. His former ways appear all froward and grievous; and as he reflects upon his ingratitude, ungodliness, and apostasy, and feels how wretched, polluted, and helpless he is, he sees himself in danger of eternal destruction. “*The wages of sin is death.*” He is made sensible that death, in its most fearful import, he deserves. He dreads it, while he apprehends it near. He is thus brought to cry out, with the full and agonizing expression of the heart, “What shall I do to be saved?” While such reflection is calculated to put the convinced sinner upon searching for a way of escape from the wrath to come, it leads him to hail with joy the announcement of a full and free salvation. Consideration of this kind is indispensable as a means of regeneration. It may exist to some extent, and yet the person remain unconverted; but without it, the individual must be regarded as in a hopeless

¹ Acts ii. 37.² Acts xvi. 30.³ Psalm cxix. 59.

⁴ In Moffat’s *Missionary Labours and Scenes in South Africa*, the following account is given of the feelings and expressions of a Bechuana female convert:—“In the course of a few days, she came to the author, in a state bordering on distraction. ‘My sins, my sins,’ was the language of her lips, tears streaming down her already-furrowed cheeks. Her half-frantic soul would hear no comfort, nor listen to any counsel. Night after night she would call me out of bed, to tell her what was to become of her soul. One day, meeting her in the street, with both hands she grasped mine, and as if her heart would break, exclaimed—‘To live I cannot—I cannot die.’ Again she was directed to the Lamb of God, and the fountain opened for her sins; but she interrupted me by saying—‘You say the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sins; do you know the number of mine? Look to yonder grassy plain, and count the blades of grass, or the drops of dew; these are nothing to the amount of my transgressions.’”—*Missionary Labours and Scenes*, pp. 573-4.

condition. Let the young, then, receive instruction, and take warning. Let them take time for serious, solemn reflection. Let them ponder each one frequently the questions—“*Whose am I? What am I doing? Whither am I going?*” Under the blessing from above, such reflections may bring them to be sensible of their guilt and misery, and may conduct them for relief to Him who has graciously said—“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹

3. The *Word of God, read or preached*, is the great means of regeneration. The testimony of Holy Scripture is most explicit on this point. “Search the Scriptures,” says the Saviour, “for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they testify of me.”² “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” “Of his own will begat He us with the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.”³ The Divine Word, perfect and infallible, is thus proclaimed to be the grand instrument of the sinner’s conversion. This may, indeed, be regarded as the *primary design* for which it is given to the sons of men. Its great object is to make known God’s excellent way of salvation. It declares the melancholy fact, to which the sinner’s conscience bears witness, that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;” that all are under God’s fearful wrath, and exposed to his dread condemnation. It offers salvation to perishing sinners. It reveals a Saviour, able and all-sufficient; and bids the most needy, and helpless, and wretched welcome to an interest in his great salvation. The Scriptures are the great means of working saving conviction. “*By the law is the knowledge of sin.*” “Is not my Word like a fire? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”⁴ The Scriptures convey light to the darkened understanding. They contain “the treasure hid in the field,” and hold forth to the destitute and perishing, “the pearl of great price.” The Word read or heard is “the good seed” of the kingdom—the spiritual seed of the soul—the great means of awakening, and nourishment, and comfort. By no other instrumentality have ever any been delivered from wrath, and conducted to “the glorious liberty of the sons of

¹ The writer would affectionately recommend to the young the habit of retiring at times for special solemn consideration and self-examination. He has known the value of youth spending some time in the evening alone in the fields for such meditation and prayer; and he cannot but regard it as, in many instances, a means blessed to conduct to joy and peace in believing.

² John v. 39. ³ Rom. x. 17; Ps. xix. 7; James i. 18. ⁴ Jer. xxxii. 29.

God." The Bible "has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." ¹ The Word must be *studied with attention, and practically applied*, to be productive of saving effects. As long as it is neglected, or read without any serious, fixed attention; or perused only for its historical records; or merely to inform the judgment or fill the memory, there can be no hope of obtaining through it salvation. It must be taken as the law of the Lord—all perfect, binding on the conscience, and converting the soul; the authentic offer from heaven of pardon and life; the proclamation of mercy to a rebel; the charter of all our hopes. It becomes the means of conversion and spiritual blessing, as it reveals and brings near to the heart Christ and his finished salvation. In the field of Divine truth lies this "precious treasure." The awakened sinner, convinced of his poverty and wretchedness, searches and finds it; and, overjoyed, he is willing to part with all that he has, and to buy that field. The Word points to Christ as the only sure refuge, and as the way that leads to its opened gates. It lifts up the Saviour, as the "brazen serpent," and exhibits the only way of deliverance for the wounded and perishing. By means of the "exceeding great and precious promises," which are contained in the Word, sinners become "partakers of the Divine nature, and escape the pollution that is in the world through lust."²

In all ages, the faithful *preaching of the Word* has been honoured as the great means of bringing men from darkness to light, and of translating sinners into the kingdom of God. "When the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe."³ When the prophet, at God's command, preached to "the dry bones," in the valley of vision, the Spirit and breath came, and entered into them, and they lived, and stood up "an exceeding great army." As the apostles went forth to execute their heaven-appointed commission, proclaimed Christ crucified as the only Saviour, and preached everywhere that men should repent, multitudes believed and turned to the Lord. And in every place, and among people the most diverse in habits and customs, the simple and faithful preaching of the Cross has been the instrumentality which God has blessed, to rescue the captives of Satan, and to bring men to salvation.

To receive saving benefit from the Word, it must be employed as a means of conversion: we must come to it for eternal life,

¹ Sir William Jones.

² 2 Peter i. 3.

³ 1 Cor. i. 21.

and receive the testimony which it contains concerning the Saviour of sinners. To every one who reads or hears it, we should be thoroughly persuaded, it must be either "the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death." Would you know the Word, as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God for your salvation?" You must regard it with the most solemn and fixed attention; submit the whole mind and heart to its directions; embrace with eagerness its gracious offers and promises, and trust entirely to its announcements. Nothing must divert the attention from searching the Scriptures, and waiting on the ministry for the life of the soul. Other books must be used only as helps to open the ear and the heart to God, speaking in his Word. The constant proclamation of Heaven to all who would have salvation is, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him." In many instances, the convinced sinner has obtained relief, and experienced the morning dawn of a time of love, by the Spirit sealing upon the heart some sweet and suitable declaration of the Word. The "righteousness of faith" is near, even in this Word which we speak and which sinners hear. Faith implanted in the heart by Divine agency credits the report; and the sinner, accepting of the gracious proposal, finds rest in Jesus, and receives the end of his faith, even "the salvation of the soul."¹

Lastly. *Prayer* and various other *subordinate means* have been blessed of God, as instruments to promote the conversion of sinners. Without entering upon topics of "doubtful disputation," we have no hesitation in declaring that God in his Word has warranted the perishing to cry to Him for deliverance; the awakened to seek to Him for mercy. He is the "Hearer of prayer," and He waits to be gracious. The applicants to the Saviour, whose cases are recorded in the history of the Gospels, who experienced his power to save, and became monuments of his mercy, called upon Him with fervent importunity, and He heard and relieved them. The woman of Canaan

¹ Our fathers were accustomed, in urging attendance upon the Word preached, to lay great stress upon a *searching ministry*—one that discriminates character, and urges the truth upon the conscience of the hearer. The excellent Christopher Love, immediately before his execution, in his last charge to his wife, urged her to seek after such a ministry, as of unspeakable importance, and to place herself and his children under it, at whatever difficulty or hazard. The plain and common observation, that "a praying people makes a useful minister," has much weight; and we should always seek blessings from above upon the servants of God who speak to us the Word of Life—and attend upon their ministrations prayerfully, for our individual salvation.

worshipped Him, and said, "Lord, help me." The blind man cried, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David." The leper prayed, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The publican said, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." Blind Bartimeus exclaimed, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." The dying malefactor prayed to a dying Saviour, "Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom." With similar petitions, and in this spirit, should awakened sinners go to the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy. They should go, freely and particularly confessing sin; they should plead in the blessed name of Him whom the Father heareth always, and in whom He is ever well pleased. They should ask the Spirit to work in them convictions; to show them the things of Christ, and to change and renew their heart. The promise is most full and encouraging, "He will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." Laying hold on this blessed assurance, they should wrestle for the blessing, and lie at the mercy-seat till they obtain it. Pardon and salvation are to be found there; and their resolution should be, "I will go in unto the king"—like that of the devoted Esther, when she went into the king uncalled, "If I perish, I perish." Contrite sinners can never go uncalled to the mercy-seat. They approach not to a capricious earthly monarch, but to the august Sovereign of heaven, seated on the throne of grace,—to Him who delights in mercy, and who gives the fullest testimony that none ever perished, or will perish at the mercy-seat.

As *subordinate means of conversion* may be mentioned, *awakening books* that contain clear views of the Gospel, and that are adapted to convince sinners—converse with faithful ministers, and with experienced Christians, and decided and circumspect separation from the world. There have been servants of God, who are honoured to speak when dead; and their writings, that were conceived and penned in prayer, have been owned to bring wandering sinners to the Saviour. Such works as Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*; Alleine's *Alarm*; Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, *Barren Fig-tree*, and several of his smaller pieces; Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*; Boston's *Fourfold State*; Booth's *Reign of Grace*; James's *Anxious Inquirer*, have been the means of awakening and conversion to some, and may be of great use to the anxious inquirer. Let them be employed, not as describing a course through which all must pass—for the cases of convinced sinners are very diversified—but in order to deepen im-

pressions of Divine things, to lead to the Scriptures, and, above all, to bring the sinner to flee personally to Christ, and to accept Him in his gracious offers; and they may be of much advantage.* Intercourse with prayerful persons, who have themselves experienced the pangs of the new birth, is sometimes of singular use, to bring the thoughtless to solemn consideration, and to direct the steps of inquirers into the way of peace. The spiritual conversation of a few pious women was as the arrow of God in the conscience of Bunyan; and to many others, who have been rescued from the path of destruction, a single pointed suitable expression of a pious acquaintance has not unfrequently been of eminent benefit. Converse with the servants of God is indeed a great privilege. Those who are seeking salvation, should by all means open their case fully to select Christian friends. They should seek from them instruction and direction; they should converse with them about spiritual things; and, above all, they should enlist their prayers in their behalf. Thus many find that Christian fellowship is the immediate way to communion with God.² Many have been drawn to Christ by the attractions of the godly converse and example of lively Christians with whom they have come in contact. It need scarcely be added, that so long as the world is loved, and thoughtless companions and frivolous pursuits are delighted in, there is no hope of enjoying converting grace. These will be freely relinquished, and that for ever, if the individual has become the subject of a great saving change. Withdrawal from the multitude, and abstraction in a good measure from worldly pleasures and pursuits, are means that conduct to greater earnestness about salvation. The command of God is, "*Come out from among them, and be ye separate;*" and the most comfortable promise is annexed to it, "*I will receive you, and be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*"³

* Doddridge's *Rise and Progress* was the means of awakening Wilberforce; and the *Practical View of Christianity*, by this distinguished man, was instrumental in leading Legh Richmond, then a fashionable, thoughtless young clergyman, to a due sense of Divine things. The simple and affecting narrative of the *Dairyman's Daughter* has been blessed as the means of conversion to many. It is related that when the author was near his end, and the *fiftieth* instance of spiritual awakening, from the reading of this tract, was related to him, the dying saint, with evident joy and satisfaction, blessed God that he had been thus honoured to promote the great work of saving sinners.

* See 1 John i. 3.

³ 2 Cor. vi. 17.

SECT. IV.—*Evidences of Conversion.*

A few brief hints will suffice to exhibit the most prominent evidences that usually accompany this important change. "*By their fruits,*" says the Saviour, "*ye shall know them.*" While it is admitted that real Christians themselves, at times, "walk in darkness, and have no light;" and through the imperfection of sanctification, and the work of the enemy, their marks of grace are obscure, it is yet presumed, that there are indications by no means indistinct which discover whether the individual is yet unrenewed, or whether by regenerating power he has passed from death unto life. All should seriously and frequently inquire on this momentous subject; and the evidences are so simple and yet so plainly delineated in the Word, that all might, with proper diligence and application, arrive at a right conclusion. We proceed to notice a few of the more obvious and palpable evidences.

First of all, this change is indicated by the *alienation of the heart from former objects of delight and pursuit*. These objects are such as satisfy the flesh, and are adapted to the corrupt inclination. The world, and its pursuits and enjoyments; the company of the frivolous, the gay, and the earthly-minded; the objects of sinful pleasure,—to these the heart was naturally addicted, and amidst these the unregenerate seek all their happiness. The Spirit of God in conversion discovers the vanity and worthlessness of such objects, and powerfully withdraws the mind from them. The delights which they administer are henceforth regarded as "the pleasures of sin," which continue but for a moment, and which leave a fearful and lasting sting behind. Intercourse with such objects is seen to be fraught with danger and irreparable injury to the immortal soul, and they are therefore relinquished. To gain the soul appears more valuable than a universe; and those things which obstructed the pursuit of eternal salvation cease to yield comfort and satisfaction. They become, on the other hand, objects of dread and settled aversion. The "father's house," and people that were ours, are forgotten, and pleasures of the flesh or the mind which were indulged before, and reflected upon with feelings of penitence and self-abhorrence, are regarded with detestation. Sin of every kind appears hateful, holiness lovely and all-desirable; and the habitual language of the

heart is, "*How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*"¹

Again, a saving change brings with it *new views and affections toward the Saviour, the Author and Finisher of faith*. "Unto you therefore, that believe, He is precious."² Formerly He was despised or rejected, or only regarded with cold speculative sentiments. Now He is embraced in the heart; trusted in for life and salvation; and regarded with profound veneration, and the most cordial love and affection. The converted person feels that he owes all to Christ; and inexpressibly more than his heart can ever conceive, or his tongue declare. He is the "Alpha and Omega" of all his joys and hopes. In his person, and finished work, and blessed example, He appears possessed of innumerable and matchless excellencies; and the heart is drawn out to desire Him and delight in Him. He is esteemed as the "treasure hid in a field;" the "pearl of great price;" and the young convert would willingly part with all to possess it. "He loves much," because he is sensible that, through Jesus, much has been to him forgiven. Christ is precious to him in his person, his love, his sacrifice, offices, relations, promises; in his service, cross and crown. He seeks to come to Him as his "exceeding joy." He esteems Him as "the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely," and the estimate and uppermost desire of his heart is to "account all things but loss and dung," that he "may win Christ, and be found in Him."³

Heartfelt and increasing humility is a further evidence of the new birth. Whatever views of sin were entertained before, it is only in conversion that the individual becomes a real penitent, and obtains the spirit of a *contrite one*. His sins beheld in the glass of the Redeemer's sufferings, his character contemplated in the light of the matchless condescension and excellencies of the "Author of eternal salvation," produce deep self-abasement. Spiritual views of the law of God humble the soul. The grace of God, abounding to the undeserving, the rebellious, and the miserable, fills it with penitential views and emotions; while the discoveries of the gracious character of a reconciled God expel the pride of the heart, and inspire a frame the most lowly and reverential. "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good; but I am carnal, sold under sin."⁴ "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, and I abhor myself, and repent in

¹ Rom. vii. 2. ² 1 Peter ii. 7. ³ Philip. iii. 8, 9. ⁴ Rom. vii. 12, 14.

dust and ashes."¹ "O Lord, I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."² Such are the spirit and language of true converts; and this is, in some sort, their habitual frame of heart. The more clear and spiritual their views of Divine things, the deeper are their feelings of self-abasement. They learn to walk "humbly with God;" they are "clothed with humility;" they cultivate the spirit of entire dependence. Like "the lily of the valleys," they take root downwards, and their spiritual beauty is seen, and their spiritual fragrance diffused in a situation to attract little observation, and where the carnal eye perceives no form or comeliness.

Love to the saints, and the spirit of universal benevolence, are inseparable fruits of a saving change. This, the Saviour emphatically teaches, is the grand characteristic of discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."³ "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God; neither he that loveth not his brother."⁴ "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that hateth his brother abideth in death."⁵ These reiterated and very explicit declarations assign a high place to the principle of love, as an evidence of a renovated nature. The spirit of genuine Christianity, it has been justly remarked, is the spirit of benevolence; and all who have been renewed in their hearts must possess it. Having been selected when unworthy to be objects of Divine compassion and benevolence, rescued from a perishing condition, pardoned and accepted, they learn to love fellow-men "with a pure heart fervently." They forbear and forgive one another, "as God for Christ's sake has forgiven" them. They "put on bowels of mercies." Their love is disinterested and active. They do good to the souls and bodies of men; they love their enemies, and they learn to bless them that persecute them, and to pray for those that spitefully use them. Towards the brethren of the household of faith, their affection is of a higher character still. It is the love of *complacency* and of holy spiritual fellowship. They delight in the image of Christ in fellow-saints; and loving "Him that begat," they "love every one that is begotten of Him." *Love is the fulfilling of the law.* True converts with fraternal affection cleave to all who give

¹ Job xlii. 5.

² John xiii. 35.

³ 1 John iii. 14.

⁴ Isaiah vi. 2.

⁵ 1 John iii. 10.

evidence that they are of the family of God. They bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. They regard them as children of the same family, called to a community of privileges, trials, and joys, and partakers of one blessed hope. With the saints, "the excellent of the earth" are all their "delights;" and they learn, as members of one body, animated by one glorious Head, to suffer with every suffering member, to "weep with them that weep, and to rejoice with them that rejoice." This disposition of mind is characteristic of all that have been adopted into the family of heaven. It is a principal feature of "the spirit of adoption," whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." When other marks of regeneration are weak or obscure, this evidence will yield satisfaction, and minister the assurance of hope. To love a saint as a saint, to delight in him as bearing the image of Christ, the Well-beloved, is a sure indication that a person has passed from death unto life, and that he has obtained an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

Finally. *Delight in the ways of holy obedience is an unequivocal evidence of real conversion.* "If ye love me," says the Saviour, "keep my commandments." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."¹ There may be the form of outward obedience to some Divine precepts, and of observance of Divine institutions, while the heart is unchanged, but such obedience is formal, slavish, and partial. There may be even zeal in religious duties, and sacrifices may be apparently made to advance religion. But the spirit of love and liberty is wanting, the aims are selfish, and the motives and ends are low and carnal, and the whole profession is, in consequence, a deception, and the service is rejected of God. The new "heart and spirit," conferred in regeneration, on the contrary, are "enlarged;" and the person inclined to holy obedience, runs in the path of God's commandments.² He is brought to reverence the authority of Him whom he has joyfully taken to be his Lord and Master. Duty becomes his delight. None of the Divine commandments are to him any longer grievous. The language of his heart is, "O Lord, I am thy servant;" "Here am I, send me;" "All the commandments of my God, I purpose to obey." Gratitude and love henceforth become the actuating principle of all his duties. He serves as "a son his father." "The love of Christ constraineth us." "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."³ In

¹ John xiv. 15; xv. 14.² Ps. cxix. 32.³ Rom. viii. 14.

the heart of every regenerated person, the Holy Spirit dwells, sealing till the day of redemption, and sweetly and powerfully drawing him to all duty. This blessed Agent works within hatred to sin, an earnest desire after holiness, and impels to vigorous and sustained endeavours to please God in all things. His it is to heal the fountain, that purifying streams may issue forth in the life. Divine ordinances and institutions appear to the renewed heart excellent in themselves, from the authority that has appointed them, and the wisdom which they display, and from their conducting to ends the most salutary and valuable ; and they are therefore delighted in. The high and holy motive of love to holiness, because it is agreeable to the nature and will of God, and the great end of living to the glory of God, assume the highest place in the thoughts and pursuits. Thus does the converted person learn to "delight in the law of God after the inner man." "He walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "*Old things are passed away, all things have become new.*" However weak may be his graces, and imperfect his attainments, there is a wide and essential difference between his feelings, habits, and pursuits, and those of the unrenewed, even in the most favourable circumstances. He is a "new creature," and his motto, as it is that of all who have experienced this great change, is, "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."¹

Having thus exhibited the nature, necessity, means, and evidences of regeneration, we cannot turn away from this part of the subject without urging the reader seriously to ponder what has been advanced ; and, above all, to seek to have the question settled, whether he himself has experienced this great change. The youthful reader should be reminded that the Scriptures declare, in terms most explicit and solemn, the grand distinction among the children of men. The whole human family is divided into two classes, the righteous and the wicked, the children of God and the children of the Wicked One ; those who are lying under God's fearful wrath and curse, and those who are objects of his distinguishing favour ; and in one or other of these classes you now rank, and with the one or other you will take your lot of happiness or misery for evermore. Heaven's irreversible sentence is, "Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him ; woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him ; for he shall eat of the fruit of his doings."² This

¹ Romans xiv. 7, 8.

² Isaiah iii. 10.

is no illusory statement. It is no fancied picture of the imagination, no figurative language, employed merely to alarm fear, or to deepen the effect. It is the plain, uniform testimony of God's unerring Word, the solemn recorded verdict of Him in whose hand is your breath, and who will be your final Judge. Let me affectionately entreat you to ponder the subject with personal and immediate application to yourself. "He that believeth," it is testified, "hath everlasting life. He that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them."¹ Consider that you are either now a partaker of everlasting life, or are lying under God's tremendous wrath; that you are either going forward to the reward of the righteous, or are in danger every moment of being cast into unquenchable fire. You have heard the declaration of Him that cannot lie, and about you it is certainly spoken. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of God." Before you has been presented a plain, simple account of this important change, such as some who on earth are now rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and as many who are now in glory have experienced it. The means by which it is ordinarily effected, and the marks by which it is indicated, have been likewise declared. What can you now say concerning your own state and character? Have you experienced aught of all this, or are you yet "far from God, and far from righteousness—living without God, and without hope in the world?" If you are *careless* on the subject, or presuming upon the vain hope of future amendment, you have reason to tremble. The matter is so momentous and urgent, that, if regarded at all, it must fix the attention and subdue the heart; and, in fact, none have, at any time, experienced regenerating influence, who had arrived at years of judgment, that have not been solemnly concerned on the subject. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "Come, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as snow." "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."² These are the gracious and affecting invitations of the Redeemer of men—of Him who is "exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and the remission of sins." They are now spoken to

¹ John iii. 36; Gal. iii. 18. ² Ephes. v. 14; Isa. i. 18; Matt. xi. 28.

you, and upon the reception which you give to the offer hangs your eternal felicity, or your everlasting destruction. Christ is now waiting to be gracious—ready to receive and bless you—as He will ere long summon you to meet Him in judgment. If you have not heretofore laid to heart the subject ; or if the evidences of the new birth in your case are obscure, let me exhort you to come to this Almighty Saviour with all speed. Flee now from the wrath to come. While mercy invites, and means of salvation are at hand, and “the Spirit and the bride say, Come,” be persuaded to relinquish carnal security, and the ways of sin, and the pursuits of the world, and to betake yourself to the Saviour for pardon and acceptance. Harken to the voice that now addresses you—“*Turn ye, turn ye ; why will ye die ?*”¹ This earnest, repeated invitation virtually declares, that if you remain unmoved and impenitent, you will *die*—you must perish for ever ; and it proclaims, in the most gracious manner, that in turning to Lord, you will escape his vindictive vengeance, and your souls shall live for ever.

Would that you were now undeceived ! The least consideration might suffice to show you, that you cannot be happy without holiness ; and that you are not Christians, except ye believe in Christ with a new heart, and delight in his service. You are sinners—guilty, polluted, and perishing. In everything you sin, and come short of the glory of God. You are condemned already, dead in trespasses and sins, under the power of the Evil One, and hastening forward to meet the dreadful doom which your multiplied and aggravated sins have merited. Let me beseech you to “consider your ways,” and turn to the Lord. Come now, “for all things are ready.” There is a Saviour ready to receive you, able and willing “to save to the uttermost all that will come unto God by Him.” There is blood that “cleanseth from all sin.” The Almighty Spirit is graciously promised to them that ask Him : and his office and glory it is to apply all the benefits of the great salvation ; and through Him you may enjoy at present all saving and sanctifying blessings. Repent, and believe the Gospel, and you will be happy. Trifle and delay, and you may be for ever undone. As we have already shown that your early piety will be of immense advantage to yourselves and others, so we would remind you that conversion in youth is of peculiar value in prosecuting a life of religion. This is the first step in a course of holiness ; and without it a profession of religion is deceptive, fruitless, and lifeless—a shadow without a substance—a skeleton

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

where there is no animating principle and no motion. A better season for giving yourselves to the Lord you will never enjoy. Your comfort and usefulness in life, your peace in death, and your felicity throughout eternity, urge you to make the instant and deliberate choice ; and to let nothing interfere with your resolution of dismissing from your mind all other concerns, till the great question of your freedom from condemnation has been settled. Come, then, to Jesus, and be saved. His sure and unchangeable word is passed, that He will not cast you out. Remember that "one thing" is unspeakably and continually "needful ;" and see that you make a present choice of "the good part that shall not be taken away from you." "Choose you this day whom you will serve." "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Jesus, the anointed Saviour,—who died to save the chief of sinners, and who urges the acceptance of his purchased and proffered salvation, by so many affecting counsels, and moving invitations,—is "the Lord, mighty to save." He seeks you to hasten now from the city of destruction. He beseeches you to come to Him. He stands prepared to receive and to bless you. "*As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*"¹

¹ John i. 12.

CHAPTER III.

PROFESSION OF RELIGION.—NECESSITY OF A PROFESSION—ITS NATURE—VALUE TO THE YOUNG OF MAKING A PROFESSION EARLY.

SECT. I.—*Necessity of a Profession.*

OUR blessed Lord has inculcated, in very strong and impressive terms, the *necessity* of a public profession of religion. He represents his followers as "the light of the world," and compares them to a "city that is set upon a hill, that cannot be hid;" and He enjoins them—"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."¹ In the most pointed terms, when referring to the judgment to come, He declares a profession of his name before men essential to final salvation: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."² And elsewhere, when teaching the incomparable value of the soul, and the urgent need of securing its salvation, He adds, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."³ With the same explicitness, the apostles of the Lamb declare the indispensable necessity of a public profession of religion. Faith in Christ is generally admitted to be essential to the enjoyment of the blessings and hopes of salvation; but the Apostle Paul connects with it, as equally needful, a profession of Christ's name. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."⁴

¹ Matt. v. 14, 16. ² Matt. x. 32, 33. ³ Mark viii. 38. ⁴ Rom. x. 9, 10.

The necessity and importance of a public profession of religion are taught, when baptism is enjoined to be observed by all who become disciples of Christ. In his last commission to the apostles, the Saviour directed them to "go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" and among his last instructions, before He ascended into glory, He declared, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."¹ On the opening of the new dispensation, by the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the apostles declared to the converts the necessity of baptism: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins."² The ordinance was designed to be a visible badge of a profession of faith in Christ, and of subjection to Him, and of separation between Christ's disciples and the rest of the world. It was to them the public renunciation of all former connections, and the pledge of allegiance to Christ as their Lord and Master. It was an act of joining themselves to his people, and the declaration of willingness to share with them a common lot. It was the outward symbol of their hearty purpose to do Christ's work, and to bear his reproach, as they expected to share his glory. And all this was enjoined, and required of all who embraced the religion of Christ, when it was first promulgated, and when manifold signs and mighty wonders attested its heavenly origin, and its irresistible power. The same authority still requires the open profession of Christ by such as would be owned as his servants in the world, and would enjoy the benefits of his salvation.

It is vain to allege, as some have done, that religion is a matter between God and an individual; and that it may be embraced and cultivated in secret, without any public observable attention to its duties. We readily admit that real saints are "*hidden ones*;" that religion has its seat in the heart; that it flourishes chiefly in the shade; that all ostentation is to be avoided and condemned; and that a pious character is unobtrusive and retiring. But this hinders not that religion should manifest its character and exhibit its commanding influence in social and public relations. It might suffice to show this, to

¹ Mark xvi. 16. It is observable that in the latter clause of this verse, it is not said that he that is not baptized, but simply, "He that believeth not shall be damned;" as if to declare, in the most emphatic manner, that the absence of faith, and not the want of baptism, excludes from the hope of salvation.

² Acts ii. 38.

observe that the Saviour has placed his people in the world to reflect his glory, and has commanded them to "let their light so shine before men," that "others may see their good works, and glorify their Father in heaven." But, besides, every Christian sustains relations to the Author and Finisher of his faith, and is called to the performance of duties, which indispensably require a public profession. Indeed, we cannot conceive a person to be a Christian, who is unwilling to have his attachment to Christ known in the world. The Saviour is the Husband and Head of his people; and his redeemed ones are represented as his Spouse, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. Does not this imply an open embracing of Christ in this relation, and a public joyful avowal of interest in Him and dependence upon Him? What would be thought of a wife who would refuse to have her espousal publicly known, or who would be ashamed to own a conjugal relation to her husband? The Redeemer is the Shepherd of his people, and they are the chosen, separated sheep of his pasture, that hear his voice, and follow Him; and of whom it is declared, "a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of a stranger." Moreover, Christ is the King of the saints; they are his spiritual kingdom in this world—his faithful subjects—the predestined jewels of his crown. Surely this implies a profession of allegiance to Him, and willing subjection to his authority, so as to display his excellency and advance his honour. The right of citizenship is founded upon known affection to the Sovereign, acknowledgment of his authority, and the homage of the life. If we are of Christ's kingdom, we will not only have said to Him in secret, "My Lord, and my God," but we will be "joyful in our King;" and we will often declare, with the fervent love and admiration of the heart, "The Holy One of Israel is our Almighty King!"

Besides, the Redeemer has established a Church in the world, in a *visible* organized form; He has constituted a family bearing his name. For this separate peculiar society, He has provided special and eminent privileges; and He requires connection with it, and the performance of the duties that result from this union, as indispensable to their enjoyment. The Church is organized in the world, and separated from it, for the purpose of recognizing Christ's authority, obeying his laws, observing his institutions, and promoting his glory. To all its members is addressed the command, "HE IS THY LORD, WORSHIP THOU HIM."¹ United to one glorious Head, they are constituted members one of another. While they love and serve Him continually,

¹ Psalm xlv. 11.

they are required to love as brethren, to perform all offices of kindness one to another, to live for others rather than to themselves, and to "do good to all men as they have opportunity." Obedience to Christ's authority certainly includes the service of the life, as well as the homage of the heart; the performance of external acts, as well as the cultivating of right dispositions and motives. How can a person be a Christian, if such duties are overlooked or neglected? Can he worship Christ as his Lord, and refuse to unite with those who in every place call upon his name? If a faithful subject delights to honour his sovereign; if a dutiful child loves and openly obeys his parent; if an affectionate wife accounts it her honour to bear the name, and promote the happiness of a beloved husband; much more will a Christian delight to confess and obey Him whose "name is excellent in all the earth"—Him to whom he is under infinite obligations, and from whose hands he expects in due time to receive the reward of a "good and faithful servant."

The saints are, in fine, *separated from the rest of the world*, and *consecrated to God*, "to show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."¹ They are his chosen *instruments* for bringing the world into subjection to its rightful Sovereign. This implies that they are not only separate from a world lying in wickedness, but that they are publicly arrayed around the standard of another Master, visibly employed in his work, and constantly aiming, in their whole spirit and conduct, that the glory of the Lord may be revealed, that all flesh may see it together. If this work is evaded as troublesome, or neglected, the claims of the person to be considered a friend of Christ are worse than doubtful. A Christian one cannot be, who does not supremely love Christ; who does not gladly, openly, and habitually acknowledge Him as his God and Saviour; who aims not to keep from the heart all his commandments; and who does not regard it as his great work and principal honour to make known the Saviour's renowned fame throughout the earth, that all kindreds of the nations may be brought to do Him homage. The profession, therefore, that one may love and serve Christ in *secret*, and refuse to confess Him before men, is a grievous delusion. It implies rejection of his authority, avowed disobedience of his commands, and is wholly incompatible with the dedication of the heart and the consecration to Him of the service of the life.

There is another deception which we fear is very common in our day, that of persons who live in a society that bears the

¹ 1 Peter ii. 9.

Christian name, thinking that to profess Christ requires *no special separation from others, and no decision in religion*. This is an evil incident to the application of the term Christian to communities, as a mere geographical or political designation; and in a low state of religion, it is of fearful magnitude, and of most disastrous consequences. Persons were baptized in infancy; they have received religious instructions; they attend upon Christian institutions; they are not grossly profane in their conversation and conduct. They, therefore, take to themselves credit for being all that is required in the followers of Christ, and they think their hopes of final salvation secure. And even where there is not ignorance or carelessness to such a degree, among the children of decent professors, we fear there are many who attach no proper meaning to the scriptural terms which are employed to describe a Christian profession. With them, discipleship requires no relinquishment or self-denial, incurs no reproach or opposition, and does not demand the engagement of the heart in religious duties, or the consecration of the life to God's service. Hence they recognize no obligation, and feel no pressing need to make a public profession of Christ before men; and the vague profession which they assume is as different from that which is enjoined by the Saviour and the apostles as can possibly be imagined. The youth of the Church should be particularly guarded against a profession of this kind. The Scriptures uniformly represent Christian discipleship as implying a serious counting of the cost, denying and forsaking all that we have; and supreme love to Christ, displayed in preferring Him infinitely above all other objects, and in readiness to forsake all for his sake. They declare that, in making and holding fast such a profession, we are "God's house," the temple of his gracious special residence, erected for the manifestation of his glory; and they represent the genuine followers of the Saviour as required to "go without the camp" to Him, "bearing his reproach;" as separated from an evil world, and called to encounter from it hatred and persecution. It is a great delusion to think that such accounts only apply to the times of primitive Christianity, or that they are descriptive of the condition of Christians, in special seasons of oppression of the Church, or of public calamity. The professors of the faith of Christ are called saints, and they should seek to realize this high designation; they should live and act as consecrated ones, devoted to God's service, and pursuing continually after universal holiness. The distinction

between the followers of the Lamb and the world that contemns and opposes them should be clearly marked now, as it was in the days of primitive Christianity. Professed believers are as imperatively called as ever they were, to exemplify the holy character of sons of God ; to be faithful servants of Christ, and to "shine as lights in the world." And they are certainly forewarned that in the world, and from it, they shall have tribulation ; and living godly, they shall endure persecution. If there is any truth or propriety in such representations—and this is the uniform testimony of the Divine Word—they emphatically teach that a profession of Christ requires solemn decision ; that it implies voluntary and resolute separation from everything that would prevent the maintenance of faithful allegiance to Christ the Lord, and the exemplification of visible holiness ; and that Christians may always expect manifold opposition from the world.¹ A profession which contains not these elements, God can never approve ; a cause embraced through custom, education, or in an inconsiderate lifeless manner, will not be firmly held, and can impart no sustaining supports, or living comforts. Let the youth of the Church therefore seriously consider that, in professing Christ, they must forsake former thoughtless courses and foolish companions ; that they must come out on the side of Christ, to follow Him whithersoever He goes ; never to be ashamed of his cross ; and that they are solemnly engaged to be henceforth examples to others of the power of godliness. If they propose to themselves lower aims and ends, they only deceive themselves, do incalculable injury to the cause which they avouch, leading fellow-professors into formality and hypocrisy, and confirming others in infidelity and irreligion.

SECT. II.—*The nature of a Religious Profession.*

The nature of a proper religious profession comes now to be considered. The *matter* which it embraces may be said, in brief terms, to be *true religion*, just as we speak of other professions,—the medical profession, meaning the knowledge and

¹ The trials to which the converts from Paganism in some places, and those to which such as relinquish Popery for evangelical truth, even in parts of this country, are exposed, show the opposition which a scriptural profession has to encounter. Our profession, even in circumstances of no outward difficulty, must be able to sustain us under similar trials, else we have cause to suspect that it is not genuine.

practice of the science of medicine ; and the military, that of the art of war. And as religion may be viewed under a two-fold aspect, as a system of faith, worship, and morality, revealed in the Scriptures ; and as the views and dispositions of genuine piety in the heart ; or, in other words, as *objective* and *subjective* religion, a religious profession is to be regarded as comprehending both. In the fullest sense, whatever God has revealed in his Word, may be taken as the matter of a true religious profession. "THE BIBLE," it has been appropriately said, "IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS."¹ What God has seen fit to reveal, it is important for man to know, believe, and profess. The Scriptures are the standard of infallible truth, and to us they are given as a "banner" to be displayed. All right knowledge about religion is derived from this source, and the Scriptures, too, are an unerring rule of holy practice. In making a profession, we are called to be God's witnesses ; and while it is required, if we would be faithful and true, that we speak what we know, we should be concerned to utter nothing that is not in strictest accordance with the record that God has given us, and to embrace in our testimony whatever is contained in that record. Nothing is here trivial or unimportant ; and although some portions of revealed truth are more important than others, none are unessential. Whatever God has been pleased to reveal, we should consider important to know, and should regard it incumbent on us to profess. A Christian confessor should labour to possess an extensive acquaintance with revealed truth ; and he should be ever prepared to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, to buy the truth and not sell it, and to regard every particular contained in it as more precious than the most fine gold.

But it may be necessary to be more specific in speaking of the profession which it is the duty of the young early to make. To confess Christ, is to recognize publicly his character and claims ; it is to subscribe to the truth and excellence of the doctrines which his Word contains, and to avow them as the belief of our hearts ; it is to embrace Him as our Lord and Master, and swear perpetual allegiance to Him in this character ; and it implies the entire surrender of ourselves to his service, and to the advancement of his glory. The profession of our faith must, in other words, contain—

First. *A cordial and joyful acknowledgment of Christ the Lord as our Saviour and Master.* We thus join ourselves to the

¹ Chillingworth.

Lord. By our profession, we declare that we are on the Lord's side. Embracing Him as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and in all endearing relations, we are not ashamed to own Him and his cause. We glory in our near relation to Him. We are of one family, that which, in heaven and earth, is named after Christ; we esteem it our greatest honour to wear the badge of discipleship, and to be distinguished from all others by our relationship to this glorious Saviour. We are his servants, the sheep of his pasture—his loving, obedient children—the soldiers of his cross—the 'predestined heirs of his glory. "Bought with a price," we are not, and we do not wish to be esteemed, "our own." The language of each genuine professor to Christ his Master is that of the Apostle of the Gentiles before heathen mariners and soldiers, "Whose I am, and whom I serve." And all who have been drawn to the service of this exalted Prince willingly declare, "O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name."¹ "All people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever."²

Secondly. *A public avowal of the doctrines of God's grace.* The grand characteristic of the doctrine of Christ is, that it is "the Gospel of the grace of God." Salvation is wholly of grace. "A great Saviour for great sinners;"—a full and free salvation for creatures undeserving, miserable, perishing;—all good in man, originating in the sovereign favour and mercy of God; and pardon and acceptance for the guilty and polluted, not in any sense through works of law, but solely as the fruit of gratuitous favour, through the obedience of the Mediator—this is the glory of the Gospel, that which constitutes the report, emphatically "glad tidings," good news from a far country. This is "the faith once delivered to the saints," the "one faith," the "most holy faith" of the saints, which is so often spoken of in the New Testament. This one all-precious faith we are bound to embrace and profess, and steadfastly to maintain. The "form of sound words" we should hold fast. Compromise or modification of the truth as it is in Jesus we can never admit, for any advantage, whether present or future, whether real or imaginary. Resting our own souls upon the precious doctrines of grace, and clinging to them as our food, treasure, life, we cannot but exhibit them as our Banner before others, and joyfully profess them as the foundation of all our

¹ Isaiah xxvi. 15.

² Micah iv. 5.

comforts and hopes. To compromise these principles, or dilute them, or amalgamate them with specious errors, would be to introduce another gospel, and to expose ourselves to the curse denounced against those who preach it. A faithful confessor must love the truth with his whole heart, witness for it in all its integrity and excellency, and should himself exemplify its life-giving and transforming power. Thus, and thus alone, will the Church be united, prospered, and perfected. "Speaking the truth in love," the Church, as a mystical body, "grows up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."¹

Thirdly. *The devout and diligent observance of ordinances of worship.* These are instituted by the authority of Zion's King, whom the believer willingly owns as his Lord and his God; and whose honour he regards himself as specially bound to advance. They are appointed as acts of homage to an exalted and glorious Sovereign: they furnish plain and palpable tests of obedience; and through them, as ordained means of salvation, high and heavenly blessings are enjoyed. Religious ordinances constitute a principal part of Christ's yoke; and such as, "labouring and heavy-laden," come to Him for rest, must take it upon them, and joyfully wear it. Others may neglect holy ordinances, or may observe them in a trivial and careless manner; or may attend upon some religious institutions, as convenience or custom may dictate, while others equally important are wholly overlooked. The true disciple of Christ regards it as his honour and highest delight to obey the mandates of his exalted King, and to advance his glory. While he willingly gives Him the homage of the heart, he knows that he cannot withhold from Him external acts of worship, if he would confess Him before men. Prayer in secret, so frequently enjoined, he views as an essential function of his spiritual existence; and he makes it so much his business, that he may be said to "pray without ceasing." His delight is to be alone with God. His principal work is at the throne of grace. He learns, in all things, "by prayer and supplication," to make his requests known unto God. He wrestles for the blessing, and seeks solid rest and consolation where it is alone to be obtained, at the mercy-seat; and many a happy hour he spends in the closet, pouring out his heart to Him who sees in secret, and who has promised to reward him openly. The various relations of life imply the acknowledgment of God who instituted them, in corresponding acts of worship. He is "the

¹ Ephesians iv. 15.

God of all the families of Israel," and a profession of his name requires that the household should be dedicated to Him; that an altar should be erected to Him in the house; and that all that concerns the family should be regulated so as to promote the Divine honour, and to secure his blessing. If the professor of Christ's name has a family committed to him, he will make it his chief study, as David, to "bless his house." His resolution will be, that "he and his house will serve the Lord." His dwelling will be consecrated as "a house of prayer;" the voice of joy and melody will be heard in it, and the sacrifices of prayer and praise will be brought daily to the family altar.

God is the author of the social relation; and in the blessed economy of redemption, He has constituted a household of faith—one family that in heaven and earth is named after Christ. Communion of saints, which implies fellowship in good things, and mutual sympathy in evil, cannot be fully realized without acts of joint social worship. He who has himself passed from death unto life dearly loves the brotherhood of faith; and in the spirit of his profession, this love will attract him, as with magnetic power, towards fellow-professors, that they may speak often one to another. Believers, in the right frame, can never be indifferent to the *fellowship-meeting* for spiritual converse and prayer. They cannot "forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is," but will "exhort one another daily." The "saints on earth, the excellent," are the believer's "delight;"¹ and the desires and rest of his heart being with them, he cannot but seek after the social prayer-meeting, where his spiritual longings are satisfied. Thus he meets with fellow-travellers to Zion: he converses with members of the same family; he enjoys the benefit of united prayer; and realizes in the presence of the Lord whom he loves the fulfilment of the all-gracious assurance, "Where two or three are met in my name, there am I with them."²

Public ordinances, whether stated or occasional; hearing the word, engaging in the prayers and praises of the sanctuary; receiving the sacraments, the seals of the covenant of grace; public fasting and thanksgiving; and vowing to God, are comprehended in the matter of a proper profession; and the person who makes it will diligently and reverently observe them. These are to be maintained in their purity and integrity; not curtailed to suit human caprice or convenience, nor polluted by any intermixture of human invention. These form the "service of the sanctu-

¹ Psalm xvi. 3. ² See *The Fellowship Prayer Meeting*, in this Volume.

ary," and Christians, as being "a royal priesthood," have a deep and constant interest in its performance. It is impossible that any who love the King of Zion should be unconcerned about the ordinances of his house. They are established to manifest his glory; they are appointed means of intercourse with Him, and through them He confers upon his people all saving blessings. Hence it is that the believer professing Christ, says from the heart, "The habitation of thy house I have loved well." All his "well-springs" are in Zion; and his fixed purpose and ruling desire are to wait upon God in the institutions of the sanctuary, expecting, through them, the discoveries of grace, and the earnest of glory—"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."¹

It should always be borne in mind that, while diligent attendance upon the institutions of religious worship is necessary, as distinguishing those who yield obedience to Christ from those who obey Him not, the *manner* of the observance is of immense importance. Mere bodily service profiteth little. Professing Christ in acts of worship, we should have grace that we may worship with reverence and godly fear. We should aim to advance his glory and enjoy his presence above all things. In *faith*, we should attend upon Divine institutions. "He that cometh unto God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." They that worship Him must worship Him "in spirit and in truth;" for He "seeketh such to worship Him."²

Finally. A religious profession requires a *readiness to vindicate Christ's cause, and embraces all the precepts of Gospel morality*. Occasions will frequently arise in the life of every professor, in which he will be called to avouch his Master, avow his truth, and defend it against gainsayers; give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear, and urge the claims of Christ's cause upon those with whom he has influence or authority. These duties he cannot evade, if he would be true to his Master. The faithful professor has no disposition to shrink from their performance, whatever difficulty he may encounter, or to whatever risk he may be exposed. His calling is to be a witness for Christ and his truth, and to these he will reckon it his honour and privilege to bear unswerving testimony, even amidst opposition, and enmity, and reproach. A holy practice is alone becoming a holy pro-

¹ Psalm xxvii. 4.

² Hebrews xi. 6; John iv. 23.

profession. The disciple of Christ, while he loves his Master supremely, learns to love his neighbour as himself. In discharging faithfully all relative duties, he exemplifies the excellency of his principles, and adorns the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. The least of Christ's commandments cannot be wilfully overlooked or violated, but on pain of forfeiting the kingdom of heaven. A conversation becoming the Gospel, a conscience void of offence toward man, as well as toward God, are indispensable to a Christian profession; and those who rightly display it will habitually remember the comprehensive inspired direction, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."¹

SECT. III.—*The spirit in which a Profession is to be maintained.*

A profession of this kind, to subserve the great ends for which it was appointed to be made, must be maintained with all *publicity and candour*, be marked by *decision*, be made in the *most solemn manner*, and adhered to with all *constancy and steadfastness*.

First. It must be *public* and *candid*. A gospel profession is compared to a *lamp*, lighted and set up in a conspicuous place. Witnesses are candlesticks or torch-bearers. The Church is "the pillar and ground of truth;" and Christians, her true members, are as "lights of the world," "a city set on a hill that cannot be hid." All these representations imply the necessity of publicity in the profession of Christ. The word *profess*, or *confess*, carries in it prominently this idea, and likewise expresses the concomitant idea of simplicity and candour in the profession. And when we are directed to confess "before men," and "with the tongue," it is evident that the object in calling for a profession at all is, that it should be made openly, so that all may fully see and understand it. Those who profess Christ are commanded to be "ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."² Obedience to this precept, and to others of kindred meaning, supposes publicity and simplicity. Indeed, the whole business of a religious profession proceeds on the ground that

¹ Philippians iv. 8.

² 1 Peter iii. 15.

these two attributes are indispensable and prominent. Without them, the grand ends of a religious profession—God's glory and the good of men—cannot be reached. The light that is given us to display must not be confined—it must not be hid “under a bushel,” but placed upon a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. We must come to Jesus not, as Nicodemus, “by night,” but boldly, openly, espousing his cause, and joining ourselves to his people. We should publicly proclaim our attachment to Him, and, with candour of mind and plainness of speech, declare at all times that we have chosen the Lord to serve Him.

Secondly. *Decision* is equally necessary to a right profession. In any profession in life, decision of character is essential to honourable distinction and success. The undecided are timid, and indolent, and wavering; and in this state of irresolution, in vain do they look for success in any pursuit. On the other hand, before the fixedness of purpose, and energy of endeavour, implied in decision, difficulties melt away; and ends are compassed, the attainment of which once appeared all but impossible. A religious profession demands decision and promptitude, as well in its commencement as in its whole future course. There must be calm, deliberate counting the cost; the willing relinquishment of objects that would interfere with the service of religion; and the resolute choice of a course which is to be followed and delighted in till the end of life. To “halt between two opinions,” to “serve God and mammon,” to be undecided in relation to the path of duty, and irresolute and fitful in pursuing it, are states of mind inconsistent with a confession of Christ before men. The reverse of all this is the character of a faithful confessor. In choosing his Master and service, his heart is fixed; in difficulty and trial, he is firm and inflexible. No matter what others do, he is prepared to act with decision, whenever he discerns the path of duty; and in testifying to truth, and yielding himself to the service of religion, he cleaves to the Lord “with purpose of heart.” The language of the veteran Joshua is his—“If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”¹ And if called to suffer while they witness, the spirit of faithful confessors will be that of the three Hebrew confessors—“We are not careful to answer thee in this matter: if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will

¹ Joshua xxiv. 15.

deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou has set up." ¹ Or with the Apostles of the Lamb, they can appeal with intrepidity to adversaries, rejecting their solicitations, and unappalled by their terrors—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to obey God or man, judge ye." ²

Thirdly. It should be *solemnly made and ratified*. The original word for confessing Christ most frequently used in the New Testament, embraces, in its radical meaning, the idea of *an oath or vow*. Thus should a Christian profession always be characterized. As in baptism, there is a solemn devotement to the Lord, and engagement to his service; so, in professing Christ before men, a vow of allegiance is made to Him, and, by promise and covenant, we renounce all other lords, and dedicate ourselves to Him for ever. Taking hold of God's covenant, each professor says, virtually vowing, "I am the Lord's," and "subscribes with his hand to the Lord." ³ With all the solemnity of an oath, we bind ourselves to the service of Christ. By personal dedication or covenanting, we yield ourselves to the Lord; and by public social vows the Church is married to her exalted Head, and is engaged to all fidelity in homage and obedience. The public profession that has eminently conduced to the promotion of the Divine glory, has been, in all ages, a *covenanted profession*. Under the Old Testament, it was designated by *vowing a vow to the Lord*;—every tongue swearing to Him,—being joined to the Lord in a conjugal relation. Under the New Testament, it is termed *joining ourselves to the Lord, yielding ourselves to Him*; and as an early example of such a profession, eminently approved and commended, it is said of the Macedonian churches, "they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then unto us by the will of God." ⁴

Lastly. The profession thus made is to be adhered to with all *constancy and steadfastness*. How frequently and solemnly is this spirit enjoined in connection with a religious profession! "Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." "Hold fast that which thou hast till I come, that no man take thy crown." "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." ⁵ These, and many similar directions, enforced by the most weighty arguments, enjoin steadfastness, as opposed to all versatility and inconstancy.

¹ Daniel iii. 16-18.

² Acts iv. 19.

³ Isaiah xlv. 5.

⁴ 2 Corinthians viii. 5.

⁵ Phil. iii. 15; Rev. iii. 11; Heb. x. 23.

They urge to perseverance to the end in the Christian course. Every view of a Christian profession implies steadfastness of purpose and advancement in pursuit. The marriage-contract is for life; the vow of allegiance is lasting; the soldier's oath to his general is taken to be a pledge of adherence in all changes of fortune, in success or defeat. Such is the profession of the name of Christ; his truth is never to be forsaken; his service never abandoned. *Enduring to the end* is the Christian's character—"Steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord," is the motto of his conduct; and the precept and promise constrain his obedience and animate his exertions, "BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO THE DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE THEE A CROWN OF LIFE."¹

SECT. IV.—*The membership of the Church.*

None can rightly make a profession of religion, without publicly entering the fellowship of the Church. This is an eminent means of confessing Christ before men, and therefore we treat of it somewhat more in detail. "*The visible Church,*" as it is well described by the Westminster Divines in the Larger Catechism, "*consists of all such as profess faith in Christ, with their children.*"

When baptized children arrive at years of judgment and accountability, it is required of them that they should openly and cheerfully acknowledge their baptismal engagements, and join themselves to the Lord. The Church is erected and maintained in the earth as a society professing faith in Christ; and a primary design of its establishment was, that there might be gathered into it all who, in every place, make such a profession. It is, therefore, an institution divinely appointed, and suitable for disciples, who come to Christ and submit to Him, making a profession which distinguishes them from the rest of the world, and which manifests them to be on the Lord's side.

The Church is a community of which Jesus Christ is the legislative, governing, and vital Head. It is the "one family in heaven and earth" which is named after Him, his mystical body, his spouse to whom is addressed the command, "He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him."² Connection with this society, therefore, implies a public declaration of accepting Christ

¹ Revelation ii. 10.

² Psalm xlv. 11.

as our Head, submitting to his authority, and depending upon Him for everything. It is established in the world as "the pillar and ground of truth,"—like a monumental pillar to raise aloft the standard of truth, and to display it amidst surrounding darkness. Hence the best way to profess Christ's truth is to enrol one's self in this excellent community. The Church consists of "all that in every place call upon the Lord, both theirs and ours;" and rendering to its exalted Lord suitable homage will be best done by joining in the solemn acts of the Church's worship, public and social. In fine, this society is framed to be the kingdom of Christ in the world; governed by the sceptre of his grace, and obedient to his laws; and as distinguished by the maintenance of truth and a godly practice, "a light shining in a dark place." The profession of subjection to Christ will therefore be best made by publicly joining ourselves to the body of Christ's disciples, and cultivating their special and separate fellowship. If we have one Lord and one faith, we must be of one body, and members each one of another. If, like the Moabitish convert, we resolutely go forth to the land of Israel and say, "Thy God shall be my God," we must be prepared at the same time to declare, "Thy people shall be my people."¹ The two relations are represented in the Scriptures as inseparable. Union to Christ implies union, through Him, with all who acknowledge Him as their Head. Fellowship with God is realized through the Word faithfully declared, and by means of communion with God's people. This is the nearest step to its participation—the immediate means that conduct to its enjoyment,—"That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."²

It is indeed difficult to conceive how there can be a profession of Christ, where there is a refusal to enter the membership of the visible Church, or where this duty is unduly delayed or neglected. The Church is Heaven's institute for confessing Christ, maintaining his truth, preserving his ordinances, and promoting his glory in the world; and it has been determined by infinite wisdom that these high ends cannot be effected by any other instrumentality. So long as the individual has not visible connection with this important society, he cannot be said to sympathize with these ends, or to give himself to seek their attainment. He has not fully come out on the Lord's

¹ Ruth i. 16.

² 1 John i. 3.

side ; and, as far as he is concerned, a profession of faith in Christ, and of subjection to Him, is not made. In such a case, neglect or delay is tantamount to refusal, and the Saviour's declaration is strictly applicable, "He that is not with me is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." †

As we have shown that one cannot be said to esteem Christ and his salvation, who is unwilling to confess Him openly, so we remark that love to the Saviour, where it really exists, will constrain to seek union and fellowship with his Church. The Church is the elect, loved Spouse of Christ ; the Bride, the Lamb's Wife. It is his "garden enclosed," "his vineyard of red wine," his "pleasant plant." The advancement of his honour is inseparably connected with the stability and progress of his Church ; and Zion's increase and prosperity are constantly near to his heart. This is his "*rest*," where He ever stays, for He is pleased with it. He "delights in the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of Jacob." Her walls are continually before Him. His eyes and his heart are there perpetually. Such being the Saviour's estimate of his Church, it seems evident that those who have tasted that He is gracious, and who have been taught to live for his glory, must desire incorporation with this distinguished community. As they value the love of Christ, they will seek to be numbered with those on whom it is exclusively centred. As they desire his gracious presence, they are drawn to the people and places to whom it is promised ; and as they cannot but seek that his glory may fill the whole earth, they will regard it as at once their duty and privilege to be connected with an institution expressly ordained for the purpose of spreading the Saviour's "renowned fame" to the limits of the globe, and of bringing all people into willing subjection to his authority.

The qualifications for Church Membership.

What is implied in church membership, and the qualifications for entering the fellowship of the Church, require to be briefly considered. *Regeneration* or *real saintship* cannot be regarded as a term of visible membership ; because man cannot judge the heart, and cannot certainly know the state before God. The visible Church is an assembly of saints and sinners. Into

† Matthew xii. 30.

the gospel net, fishes good and bad are gathered, and they are not completely separated till, at the last judgment, the net is drawn to the shore, and the righteous and the wicked are for ever parted. Notwithstanding, those who have the keys of the kingdom should use their utmost pains to separate the precious from the vile, and to make a difference between the clean and the unclean. And those who enter the visible Church are under the most solemn responsibility to see that they have evidence of being *first in Christ*, before they essay to *join themselves to his people*. In the days of primitive Christianity, the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. It is declared concerning the primitive professors, that "they gave themselves first to the Lord," and then to his servants, to perform all duties connected with their ecclesiastical state, "according to the will of God."¹ It therefore deeply concerns every person who would profess Christ, by entering into the fellowship of the visible Church, to have evidence that he is among the saved, and that he has voluntarily and deliberately dedicated himself to the Lord and his service.

Moreover, the *descriptions* of the Church and its members contained in the Sacred Scriptures, show what is implied in its fellowship, and the qualifications requisite for enjoying it. It is designated *God's house—a spiritual kingdom—a holy nation—a peculiar people*. It is a society called out of the world, and its members are frequently entitled Called Ones, "the called of Christ Jesus."² They are called out of the world from a state of sin, and from the service of Satan, into God's marvellous light; to spiritual liberty, to God's service, and to heaven. The Church is a believing family, and its members are the faithful of the earth.

The English Church, in one of her formularies, defines the Church as "a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."³ In the invisible Church, Christ dwells in the hearts of all the members by faith; and in the visible, there must be a profession of cordial trust in Him, and fidelity in maintaining his cause in the world.

Competent knowledge of Divine things besides is implied in the

¹ 2 Corinthians viii. 5.

² Both in Hebrew and Greek, the terms for Church *ἐκκλησία*, and *ἐκκλησία*, signify an assembly of persons called or convened together.—See *M'Leod's Ecclesiastical Catechism*, Quest. 11, Note A.

³ *Thirty-nine Articles*, Article xix.

membership of the Church. Ignorance here is criminal and fatal. "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" Some degree of knowledge of themselves, of their lost state and sinfulness of heart and life, of the way of salvation, of God and his glorious character and perfections, of Christ in his person, finished atonement, and precious offices, of the Spirit and his work, and of the doctrines of grace, is indispensable to the membership of the Church. Visible holiness also, importing the performance of duties to God and man, is essential to all right ecclesiastical fellowship. The Church is the "mountain of truth" and "the habitation of holiness." The "goings-out and the comings-in thereof," "the whole limit round about is most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house."¹

The Church of Christ in the world may then be said to be a society separated from the world; organized by Christ, its exalted Head, for the purpose of professing his truth, observing his laws and ordinances, advancing his glory throughout the earth, and preparing sons for heaven. Those who join themselves to this association must do it *voluntarily*, while yet all, to whom the Word of God comes, are under the most solemn obligation to seek such fellowship. They are to enter into one and the same covenant in a public manner; and while they are pledged to the performance of all the duties implied in it, they should exemplify before the world the grand characteristics of a select society, separated from the world that lies in wickedness.

A few additional observations will conclude what appears requisite to be advanced on this topic.

1. The fellowship of the Church is ever represented in Sacred Scripture as an *all-desirable privilege*, and they who enter it must come to it with all readiness and cheerfulness. The work of grace is to make a people "willing," as in "a day of power."² Genuine converts are represented as flying "like doves to their windows," and as flowing to Zion "for wheat and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock."³ Through the work of the Spirit, multitudes, in the days of primitive Christianity, thus joined themselves to the Lord, and were added to the Church. The members of the Church should be still so characterized. They must freely, deliberately, and resolutely "choose whom they will serve." Voluntarily relinquishing the service of the world and of all other masters, they must embrace Christ as their

¹ Ezekiel xliii. 12.

² The Hebrew term for "willing" may be rendered "voluntary offering"—God's people are dedicated volunteers.

³ Isaiah lx. 8; Jeremiah xxxi. 12.

only Lord, and his service as perfect freedom. His work is most honourable. Visible fellowship with those who are designated "a royal priesthood" confers eminent distinction and true nobility.

2. Entering the membership of the visible Church *implies a solemn covenant*, and this is for substance the same, whether *verbal* or *implied*. In all ages, the practice of the Church has been to require a profession on admission to membership, in the way of a vow, solemnly and publicly made. This was done in the Jewish synagogues—to the model of whose government and worship the New Testament Church was designed to be conformed. The original words in the inspired records for *profession* or *confession* properly signify assent or consent by a covenant or oath.¹ The Apostle Paul translates the word for *swear* in the Old Testament, by a word signifying to confess or profess.² In primitive times, candidates for baptism were required publicly to express their assent to a covenant, which declared their renunciation of the devil, giving themselves up to the government of Christ, and a profession of faith.³ Forms of these covenants yet remain, and they were extensively used in both the Eastern and Western Churches.⁴ Various of the reformed churches followed the same practice; and in the *Directory for Worship*, adopted by the Westminster Assembly, it is declared, "Those who are admitted to sealing ordinances shall be examined as to their knowledge and piety. When unbaptized persons apply for admission into the Church, they shall, in ordinary cases, after giving satisfaction with respect to their knowledge and piety, make a public profession of their faith in the presence of the congregation, and thereupon be baptized."⁵ It would be very suitable that in all cases assent to this covenant were explicitly and openly made, instead of there being only an implied consent to the articles of the Christian

¹ Schleusner gives as the proper meaning of "Εξομολογία"—assent, consent, or covenant, and by metonymy, "that which is thus covenanted or agreed," and also "a league." The Septuagint employs this term in translating the Hebrew נדב, vow, or voluntary oblation. Leigh in his "*Critica Sacra*" gives the meaning, "To bear witness of one, plainly and sincerely, and to acknowledge as his own; frankly and boldly to profess what one holds in matters of religion."

² See Romans xvi. 11; Phil. ii. 10; 1 Tim. vi. 12.

³ *Hill's Lectures*, vol. iii. p. 254.

⁴ See Bingham, *Antiq. Chr. Ch.*, vol. iii. 221, 228, 231. *Apostolical Constitutions*, p. vii. sect. 4.

⁵ *Directory for Worship*, c. ix. sects. 3, 4.

covenant. However this be, entering the membership of the Church by a profession of faith and a covenant-engagement serves valuable and important purposes. It is the public acknowledgment and voluntary ratification by the individual who makes it of that covenant with God and his Church which was made on his behalf in baptism. Thus he takes upon himself the vows that were made for him by his parents ; professes his personal belief in the great doctrines of the Bible ; pledges himself to the performance of all personal and relative duties ; and avows his determination, in the strength of Divine grace, hereafter to live as a disciple of Christ and a member of his Church. An engagement thus solemnly and publicly made is of great benefit to the individual himself, and to the Church with which he becomes connected. It imposes a superadded obligation upon him to walk in all the ways of holy obedience ; among fellow-members of the Church, it gives mutual confidence and comfort ; and it supplies to all a powerful motive to concord, and faithful discipline, and united effort.

3. *Many important duties, which are plainly enjoined, cannot be suitably performed without being in the membership of the Church ;* and these are solemnly incumbent upon those who would confess Christ before men. They should love one another with a pure heart fervently. Thus do they give evidence that they are Christ's true disciples. As a holy brotherhood, they are to cherish love towards one another, in its highest exercise of complacency and delight. They should maintain oneness of affection, and unity of mind and judgment. The Spirit enjoins them to be of one heart and of one soul, having the same love ;¹ and they are represented as of one accord and of one mind ; as all speaking the same thing, perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.² They should sympathize with each other ; mutually communicate to one another's necessities, as well in things temporal as spiritual. They should watch over each other, bear one another's burdens, pray for each other, and exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day. Called out of the world, they are to maintain a holy separation from the men of it, the erroneous and the immoral, and they should embrace all opportunities of assembling themselves together for religious worship.³ They must strive together for the faith of the Gospel, and employ united prayers, counsels, and efforts for its universal dissemination. They are, moreover, to be examples to one

¹ Phil. iv. 2.² 1 Cor. i. 10, 11.³ Acts ii. 42 ; Heb. x. 25.

another, and to the world, of practical godliness. They are to provoke one another to love and good works, to avoid casting a stumbling-block before the brethren, and to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, that the name of Christ and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

These duties, all-important, and so intimately connected with the advancement of God's glory and of true religion in the world, it is evident, cannot be fully or properly discharged but in a church state. In fact, many of them are wholly overlooked, and their obligation is not acknowledged or felt, whilst persons remain out of the fellowship of the Church. How much of an approved Christian profession lies in the observance of such duties we need not wait to declare. But it must be apparent, that when they are neglected, the "grace that bringeth salvation" is not displayed in its sanctifying and elevating influence; and Christianity is shorn of its beauty, and stripped of its attraction. If, then, the profession of Christ be anything but an idle name, it will be made by publicly entering the fellowship of the Church; and maintained by diligently, faithfully, and cheerfully performing the duties which such a connection involves. Concerning fellow-Christians, the apostle declares of the members of one of the primitive churches, "They glorify God, for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ;"¹ or, as it may be better rendered, "for their subjection to the Gospel of Christ, which you have professed."² Of all Christians it is beautifully said, "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."³

Fellowship with the catholic visible Church implies membership in a particular section of the professed body of Christ. Unhappy divisions exist, and may be expected to continue till the Redeemer shall come and establish his kingdom, and until times of refreshing and reviving shall have come from the presence of the Lord. While the Christian cannot but mourn for "the divisions of Reuben," and seek, by scriptural means, their removal, he must seem to countenance them by connecting himself with one section of the Church, and by refusing ecclesiastical fellowship with others. His duty is to pray for every part of the Christian Church, and to contribute all in his power, that, in terms of the Divine prediction, there may be one Lord, and his name one over all the earth. The question with what department of the Church it may be an individual's

¹ 2 Cor. ix. 13.² Dwight.³ Heb. iii. 6.

duty to be connected, is not to be determined by considerations of convenience or worldly interest, nor to be settled by advancing proud pretensions of antiquity, or by boasting of numbers and respectability. 'The notes or marks of a true visible Church of Christ, as they have been generally exhibited by the reformed churches, are, *The true preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and a scriptural discipline faithfully administered.*' That section of the Church is to be considered most pure which, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, is in nearest conformity to God's blessed Word; and with this, an individual seeking to confess Christ before men should, at all hazards, be connected. It may be added, that that section of the Church is *faithful* that honestly bears testimony to the rights and prerogatives of her exalted Head; that is careful to maintain the observance of all ordinances, public, social, domestic, and private, and that exemplifies in the lives of its members a godly practice. That which in all things is most nearly conformed to "the pattern" exhibited in Divine revelation, is most conducive to the advancement of the Divine glory. The fellowship of that part of the Church which displays this character should be earnestly sought, and its profession, testimony, and practice eagerly embraced and carefully followed. In the words of an eloquent advocate of the Church's liberty and independence, "It is his (the Christian's) duty to pray for every part of the Christian Church, to inquire what part adheres most closely to the Holy Scriptures; and without bias, from interest or prejudice, join in that communion which is most pure, in which his edification

' The *Confession* of the Church of Scotland thus speaks—"The notes, therefore, of the true Church of God, we believe, confess, and avow to be, 1. The true preaching of the Word of God, in the which God hath revealed Himself unto us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles do declare (John iii. 34). 2. The right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed unto the word and promise of God, to seal and confirm the same in our hearts (Rom. iv. 11). Lastly, Ecclesiastical discipline, rightly administered, as God's Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed, and virtue nourished" (1 Cor. v. 3-5).

'The *Confession* of Belga declares—"Wherefore the true Church may be discerned from the false by these notes: If the true preaching of the Gospel do flourish in it, if it have the lawful administration of the sacraments, according to Christ's institution; if it do use the right ecclesiastical discipline for the restraining of vice; finally, to print up all in one word, if it do square all things to the rule of God's Word, refusing whatsoever is contrary to it, acknowledging Christ to be the only Head of the same; by these notes, I say, it is certain that the true Church may be discerned. From the which it is not lawful for any man to be severed."

may be promoted, and in which he may prove most useful to the kingdom of Christ.”¹ The precepts of inspiration are pointed and unequivocal on this article. “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”² “Go ye forth by the footsteps of the flock; feed your kids beside the shepherds’ tents.”³ “Let us follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”⁴ “Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”⁵ “Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”⁶

A public entering into the fellowship of the visible Church being thus a principal way of confessing Christ before men, the young should regard it as their privilege and honour, early to make such a profession. It is incumbent upon all to whom the word of salvation comes; it is especially incumbent upon those who were in infancy dedicated to God by baptism. Christ the Lord, who has a paramount and exclusive claim upon them and their services, requires them thus to seek Him early. He has prepared his Church as a blessed institution for their spiritual instruction. He invites them to his ordinances as well-springs of comfort and blessing; and He commands them to avouch Him to be their God, by taking their stand with his people; as the appointed way at once of declaring their separation from the world, and their adherence to his cause, and of enjoying the great blessings of his salvation. Their baptism requires them early to seek full connection with the visible Church. Their engagement was to be wholly the Lord’s, and in the full fellowship of the Church alone can they implement it. The privileges which baptism confers cannot be enjoyed, while young persons refuse or unduly delay to unite with the visible Church, and to attend upon all appointed ordinances; nor can they expect, while they act thus, that God will remember their baptismal covenant to them for good. Remaining without the membership of the visible Church, they virtually declare that they set no value on their baptism; and the vow then made on their behalf they refuse to make their own, and neglect to pay. In this state, how can they possibly expect to enjoy the blessings that pertain to a separate, dedi-

¹ *Ecclesiastical Catechism*, by the late Dr M’Leod, New York, Question 14.

² 1 Thess. v. 21.

³ Song i. 8.

⁴ Heb. vi. 13.

⁵ Phil. iii. 16.

⁶ Jer. vi. 16.

cated people? On the other hand, by an intelligent and open espousal of the Church's testimony, a young person takes his place among the volunteers in Christ's army, and claims the name of one of Zion's children. Need we add, that to himself this step is calculated to be of great and lasting advantage? The promise to Zion's children is, that they shall be "all taught of the Lord," and great shall be their peace. The membership of the Church is a safeguard against many evils and temptations, to which the young are exposed. Companionship with fellow-believers moulds the character, and blessings are enjoyed in holy ordinances, unknown to those who seek them not in the only way in which God has promised to bestow them. These are benefits of no insignificant value to the young themselves. Early decision, shown by entering the fellowship of the Church, is, besides, of much advantage to others. It gladdens and strengthens faithful fellow-professors, and is calculated to impress others, and to lead them, too, to confess Christ before men. How lovely and attractive appears the band of youthful entrants into the fellowship of the Church! Thus Zion exhibits what constitutes a sure mark of prosperity, "the dew of her youth," and a "willing people" comes to her like "dew from the womb of the morning."

If, on the contrary, the young neglect this great duty, and do not enter the fellowship of the Church in early life, such conduct is not only deeply criminal, but is generally followed by unspeakable loss. Regarded in its proper light, it implies the violation of a solemn engagement, undervaluing the greatest privileges, and contempt of the highest authority. Deferring to make a profession of religion by entering the membership of the Church is a temptation of the great enemy; alas! in many instances, too successful, to render the young careless about all religion, and to seduce them into final apostasy. Should they afterwards enrol themselves with the professed citizens of Zion, they lose the advantage of youthful impressions, and are in danger of becoming formalists or hypocrites. It has been matter of common observation with devoted ministers, who have taken pains in instructing candidates for church fellowship, that young persons, from twelve to sixteen years of age, most generally discover greater aptitude to benefit by instructions, and to receive and retain impressions of Divine things, than those who apply for admission at a later period. When vital religion is low in the Church, the sentiment is commonly avowed, that the young are in danger of entering its member-

ship at too early a period; and the counsel of lukewarm or worldly friends is, that they should not take this step till the judgment is matured. We hesitate not to pronounce such advice as delusive and injurious. There is greater danger in deferring unduly to make a public profession, than in entering the fellowship of the Church early. The first business that should occupy the thoughts and engage the pursuits of an immortal being, is the service of his Creator and Preserver. The Redeemer himself, at the age of *twelve years*, appeared with his parents at the temple; and without affirming that in all cases the young should, at the same age, be prepared to enter the membership of the Church, we may be free to say, that were parents faithful to their great trust, and were baptized youths to feel a proper sense of their obligation to the Author of their existence, they should, near that period of life, be prepared to make an intelligent profession of religion, and to become useful members of the Church.

Proper *qualifications*, it is true, are required for making such a profession. There must be previously acquired a competent knowledge of the great doctrines of the Bible; the Church's testimony must, to some extent, be understood, and the individual seeking ecclesiastical fellowship should be in the habit of performing religious duties. But when there has been a due attention to baptismal vows, either by parents or children, a young person may possess such knowledge, and be distinguished by such practice, at the period we have specified. Children can much sooner understand the great doctrines of the Gospel than is commonly believed, when they are carefully instructed in them; and when parents take them by the hand, leading them to Christ, and train them early to take on them his yoke, they will generally be found qualified to conduct religious duties to the edification of others, even in early youth. The young should always be told that they are criminally negligent, whenever they defer unduly to make a full profession of Christ before men. Let them early grasp with their hands the standard of truth. Let them choose for their companions the followers of the Lamb. Let them begin soon to engage in the service of religion, and to delight in all holy ordinances. Thus will they find the membership of the Church a safeguard from innumerable dangers and enemies; they will reap both profit and comfort from walking in wisdom's pleasant paths; their example will be beneficial to others; and of Zion the language of their hearts will be, "All my well-springs are in thee." "Lord, I

have loved the habitation of thy house." "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life."¹

SECT. V.—*Communion at the Lord's Table.*

It seems to be generally admitted that a public participation in the rites of a religious system is a profession of that religion. Thus the devotees of different Pagan systems, ancient or modern, have walked each one in the name of his god; and thus various sections of the Christian community have displayed and upheld their separate professions by their respective members associating together in the same ordinances. There are some institutions, however, attendance on which is more distinguishing than the observance of others. Of this kind are the ordinances, which have been sometimes termed *sealing* or *confirming*,—the sacraments of the Church. These may be considered as the open and visible badges of a profession; the ordained symbols, whereby we testify to the world, and to one another, that we have chosen Christ as our Saviour and Lord; that we are fully resolved to follow Him in the maintenance of his cause, and the observance of his laws; and that we desire to enjoy the closest fellowship with his people. Other institutions, such as the hearing of the Word, or the assemblies for public worship on the Sabbath, may be observed, and the distinction not be fully marked between those who profess Christ and those who profess Him not. But these were designed to be distinct and peculiar, and attendance upon them is intended to declare that the person who makes it has taken his side, and solemnly and decisively attested his profession.

1. *Nature and design of the Sacraments.*

Having previously considered the nature and design of the ordinance of baptism, and as we are not particularly required to speak of the profession made by those who were not baptized in infancy, we shall briefly notice the general *design* of the Sacraments, and then refer to the Lord's Supper, as a principal way of manifesting and sealing a Christian profession.

The Sacraments are peculiarly adapted to be distinctive badges of a profession, as they were expressly instituted by

¹ Psalm lxxxvii. 8; xxvi. 8; xxvii. 4.

Christ, the Church's glorious Head, to display his authority, and to be of perpetual obligation. They are intended, more over, as *signs* of spiritual blessings. Baptism has been already spoken of as very significant and expressive. Not less so is the Lord's Supper. The material elements of bread and wine point to the body and blood of Christ. They exhibit, in lively representation, the great facts of the incarnation, obedience, and atoning death of the Redeemer of men. They shadow forth the design of his glorious undertaking, the moral causes of his sufferings, the glorious results of his interposition, and especially the participation by his people of the blessed fruits of his death. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, as we are all partakers of that one bread."¹ This comprehensive declaration teaches, that the disciples of Christ are shown to be "one body," by partaking of the spiritual food which is administered in the Lord's Supper. By believing, they were before brought into this holy fellowship; and in this ordinance they visibly exemplify it, while they enjoy the great benefits which result from union to the living Head, and to his members.

The Sacraments are likewise *seals*, intended to confirm to his people his promises, and to ratify his covenant-engagements. A seal among men is employed either to appropriate, or to authenticate and confirm. Attached to a document, it denotes that the person who applies it acknowledges in the fullest manner his interest in it; and it assures the party concerned, that the document to which it is affixed is genuine and binding. As applied to holy ordinances, the term signifies that God who instituted them has given them *to confirm his faithful promises* to those who partake of them, and to assure them of the certain enjoyment of the blessings promised. Strictly speaking, God's unchangeable Word is sufficient; but in condescension to our weakness, and that his people may have strong consolation, He has appended these ordinances as visible seals of his promises. Thus He promised to Noah, that He would no more destroy the earth with a flood; and He established the rainbow as a visible seal, or a perpetual confirmation and pledge of the promise. In like manner, the Christian sacraments are designed to assure the believer that he shall receive the blessings promised, so sure as he partakes of the external

¹ 1 Corinthians x. 16, 17.

symbols. Circumcision is declared by the Apostle Paul to have been "a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith."¹ To Abraham and his descendants, the mark in their flesh not only formed a standing distinction between them and others, but it also conveyed the assurance that God would regard as righteous all who believed his Word, and received the promise of the Seed to be revealed. Baptism, it is evident from Colossians ii. 11, 12, has been instituted for the same object, for it and circumcision are there represented as of similar import. And when its Divine Institutor said, concerning the Lord's Supper, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood," it is plain that He meant that the covenant was ratified by his blood. There is a double figure in the words. The cup is put for the wine contained in it, and the wine is an emblem of the blood by which the covenant is confirmed, and by which it becomes a glorious new testament, conveying rich spiritual blessings to the heirs of salvation. The Sacraments are, therefore, visible pledges or confirmations of the great facts of human redemption, and assurances that God will actually bestow the blessings of salvation—pardon, sanctification, and eternal life—upon all that believe.

Being seals on God's part, they are expressive, likewise, of a particular engagement on ours. In believing, we set to our seal that God is true; and especially in the reception of the Christian sacraments, we come under a solemn engagement to devote ourselves to the service of Christ. The Gospel is sometimes represented as a *covenant*, and this implies mutual stipulations. God graciously offers to his people the blessings of life and salvation, and in the Sacraments gives the strongest assurance of their enjoyment; on their part, believers promise faith and obedience, and bind themselves by solemn pledges to be the Lord's. Duty is inseparably connected with privilege, and they who rightly partake of the seals of the covenant join themselves to the Lord in "a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten." These ordinances, then, instituted by the Church's exalted Head, were plainly intended to be of constant obligation, and were designed to distinguish the followers of Christ from the world; to exhibit the truths of the Gospel, and the rich benefits of salvation; to seal to believers Divine promises; and to lead them to covenant with God. They are, therefore, ordinances of deep and solemn interest, and of great importance. God's people have not unsuitably been termed the "*Sacramental*

¹ Romans iv. 11.

Host," as they are a holy and separate fraternity, who have solemnly bound themselves by sacraments to live to his glory. There is still an additional view to be presented of the Christian sacraments: they are efficacious *means of grace*, as well as signs and seals of the covenant. By this remark, it is not intended that there is an inseparable connection between the participation of the Sacraments and the actual communication of grace, or that persons who enjoy them, however administered, receive saving grace, irrespective of moral character. This is the mere dogma of superstition. It is to return again to the beggarly elements of Judaism; it is to re-impose upon the Church the yoke of those who taught that circumcision and sacrifices were effectual for salvation, without faith and holy obedience. This extravagant tenet is opposed equally to the Divine Word, and to all observation and experience. "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" and this declaration, true of every part of the service of religion, is especially applicable to the Christian sacraments. They are of spiritual efficacy to them only who by faith receive them. To believers, they are valuable means of conferring and strengthening grace. As the different senses are addressed through the external symbols, so, in scaling ordinances, much more than in other appointed institutions, the great objects of faith are presented with peculiar vividness and impressiveness. The near sight of a crucified Saviour leads to repentance and the mortification of sin. The affecting memorials of redeeming mercy draw the heart to love and gratitude. The rich benefits of salvation, like a full feast, fill and satisfy the soul; while the solemn engagements into which the individual is called to enter, serve to nerve him with new resolution, and to animate him to all holy obedience. In all Gospel ordinances there is food provided for faith, but in these is presented wisdom's full feast. They are as the "banquet of wine." Those who share in their enjoyment are brought into the "banqueting house;" and in anticipation of holy communion in the Sacraments with God and with fellow saints, they can each one say, "My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips;" or, as they come away from their enjoyment, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."¹ Those who have felt most interest in the Sacraments, and who have most desired access to them, have been in all ages Christians of a large stature. As they have waited upon

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 5; Song ii. 3.

them, their views have been enlarged, their affections warmed and elevated. They have become more dead to the world and the pleasures of sense; more heavenly in their spirit and conduct; and beholding through this bright medium the glory of the Saviour, they have been changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2. *Obligations to observe the Lord's Supper.*

The OBLIGATIONS to observe the Lord's Supper are of the most powerful and constraining kind. All Christians are required thus to commemorate the Saviour's death, by the authority of Zion's King. This is, moreover, the *command of his love*—his parting dying command. As the New Testament passover was instituted at a time the most affecting and momentous in the world's history, so the institution, surrounded as it is with an array of circumstances most affecting, has the strongest claims upon the Christian's observance and veneration. The Saviour has expressly declared, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." But this institution is more than a bare command to claim obedience and to test friendship. It is a *love-token* left behind by a dear departed friend; and if we are unmindful of it, or habitually neglect its observance, we cannot possibly be regarded as cherishing towards Him sentiments of esteem and respect.

Moreover, the observance of the Lord's Supper is appointed to be *a principal way of confessing Christ before men*, and therefore attendance upon it is an indispensable duty. Thus we exhibit allegiance to the Captain of our salvation; thus we glory in his cross, and show forth his death; and thus we publicly mark our separation from the world, and our communion with God's people. If this is Heaven's prescribed way for owning our relationship to Christ and his saints, can we neglect it, and be free of criminality? Can we overlook it, and vainly hope to be partakers of the blessed fruits of the relation? Regarding the Sacraments as *seals* of the covenant, we cannot neglect them without disregarding the covenant itself, and undervaluing its excellent provisions. God has as closely connected the seal with the enjoyment of covenanted blessings, as He did of old the offering of the appointed sacrifice upon the altar with the remission of sin. It is true, in the one case and the other, the outward rite was nothing without faith and repentance, and other holy dispositions. But

the neglect of the appointed ordinances would certainly evidence a man to be destitute of the moral dispositions which constitute the principle of all right obedience, and is therefore a wilful rejection of the covenant itself.

And, finally, *the abundant enjoyment of holy privileges* is connected with the dutiful observance of sealing ordinances. These are eminent *means of grace*, of singular advantage to the partaker himself, and of much value for the edification and comfort of the Church at large. Neglecting them, we forsake our own mercies; while, on the other hand, by their right observance, we obtain spiritual strength and vigour and refreshment. Our souls are filled "with marrow and fatness," and we go on our way rejoicing. The great Master of the feast once said to his sorrowing disciples, on the eve of instituting the Lord's Supper, "*with desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*" He still cherishes a similar desire after communion with his people in the seals of his love; and He is prepared to confer on them all the substantial and enduring blessings of spiritual communion with Himself. Should not his disciples hail with unmingled satisfaction a meeting with the Lord in the banqueting-house? Should they not gladly welcome the occasion of commemorating the unparalleled love of Jesus, and of showing forth his death? Should they not feel the constraining force of a special obligation, impelling them to say with an honoured servant of Christ, as he triumphed over discouragements and difficulties, '*I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem?*'"¹

3. *Qualifications for observing the Lord's Supper.*

If such is the nature of the Lord's Supper, and such the obligation of its observance, the natural inference is, that *special qualifications* are required of those who would seal their Christian profession by attending upon this ordinance. Other institutions of our holy religion, such as the preaching of the Word, are open to all, but this is obviously distinguishing and peculiar. It is not instituted for the conversion of sinners, or for gathering in rebels and wanderers to the household of faith; but for confirming to the friends of Christ the benefits of the covenant of grace, and for nourishing up the children of the family to life everlasting. It is not a *converting* but a *sealing, and strengthening, and comforting ordinance*; and they who are

¹ Acts xviii. 21.

invited and entitled to partake of it, are those who, in actual union to the glorious Head, enjoy holy fellowship, too, with all the members of his mystical body. The invitation to wisdom's feast is offered in these terms: "Eat, O friends, drink ye, drink abundantly, O beloved." And the communion which the saints have with Christ, and with one another, is declared to be maintained and exhibited through sealing ordinances: "We are all one body and one bread; for we are all partakers of that one bread."¹ To realize this fellowship, and so to share in the spiritual benefits of this Sacrament, we must possess the requisite qualifications.

We are always to make the distinction between the qualifications which the Church is bound to require of those who are admitted to her fellowship, and those which the same persons should seek for themselves, either in entering the Church at first, or in coming to ratify their profession at the Lord's table. A title in man's sight to holy ordinances must consist in a credible profession, and in a deportment becoming the Gospel. Before God, the Judge of all, nothing will do but faith which receives and rests upon Christ alone for salvation, and which works by holy obedience. The Church, or its officers, cannot judge the heart. They can only demand the external qualifications which would seem to evidence that the profession is made in sincerity; and they must see that there is nothing outwardly inconsistent with Christian principle in this life. The tares and the wheat will grow together in the same field till the harvest day, notwithstanding all the desire of servants to have them separated. There rests, however, upon those who hold office in the Church, a strong obligation to see that the standard of scriptural qualifications for admission to holy ordinances be not lowered; and an awful necessity lies upon those who would partake of the seals of the covenant, to see that they are actually interested in the covenant; and that, desiring to enjoy the children's bread, they indeed pertain to the family of God.

The qualifications indispensable to those who would desire spiritual benefit from observing the Lord's Supper may be reduced to *three*—*religious knowledge; faith in the great object exhibited in the ordinances, and the blessed truths which it holds forth; and the dispositions of heart* which truth, when rightly believed, invariably produces.

1. A profession of religion demands, as a primary qualification, a due measure of *scriptural knowledge*. Ignorance, instead of

¹ 1 Corinthians x. 17.

being the mother of devotion, is the parent of sin, and leads to fatal delusion. Through the knowledge of the truth all the blessings of salvation are conferred. Sinners are thus regenerated and justified ;¹ believers are sanctified through the truth ; thus also are they established, and guided onward to glory. A profession, to be of any value, must be an *intelligent* profession. As the participation of the Sacrament of the Supper implies the renewing of a profession of Christ, there is evidently required, as a qualification for it, knowledge of the great leading doctrines of the Gospel. Intended as a standing memorial of the death of Christ, to observe it aright supposes a knowledge of the person and character of Christ, the causes and design of his death, and the great benefits which He thereby procured for the children of men. A knowledge of the sinner's loss through Adam, and of his recovery through Christ ; an acquaintance with the nature and provisions of the wondrous scheme of human redemption, is fundamental to an intelligent profession of Christ, and essential to the enjoyment of all holy privileges. As there is brought into view in the Lord's Supper a number of elements and actions which shadow forth spiritual mysteries, so it is requisite that he who professes to observe the ordinance should know the import of the symbols, and the blessings which they figuratively indicate.

The grand distinguishing property of the knowledge which constitutes a proper qualification for the sacramental feast is, that it be *experimental* and *practical*. It is the knowledge of the heart—it leads its subject to *feel* in accordance with new spiritual views ; and while it enlightens the mind, it expands the affections, and constrains to the obedience of faith. Correct views of Divine mysteries are accompanied by devout affections ; the power of the Gospel formerly hid is now felt ; and by means of external instruction, the individual taught by the Spirit obtains a new relish for Divine things, and grows in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Such knowledge is often possessed by babes in Christ ; it is frequently found with the illiterate, more than with those who possess human learning, and other external advantages. The attainment of it not being dependent upon external circumstances, all should earnestly seek after it. How small a portion of the knowledge of Divine things is sufficient to warrant admission to the sealing ordinances we do not pretend to say ; but wherever evidence is afforded of it being heartfelt and

¹ James i. 18 ; Isaiah liii. 11.

practical, the great qualification is possessed. "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."¹ Parents should early and faithfully instruct their children in the nature of Divine mysteries, with a view to their sealing their profession at the Lord's table. The young should apply their minds diligently to the study of Divine truth; and, above all, the presence of the Great Teacher should be fervently sought. "What I know not, teach thou me." The promise is most encouraging—"All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."²

2. *Faith*, implying the confidence of the heart in Christ, and the cordial belief of the truths connected with his mediation, is requisite to a proper commemoration of the Saviour's death. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." If we avow allegiance to Christ as the Captain of our salvation, we must choose Him as our Saviour, embrace Him as our Head and Lord, accept of Him in all his offices, and rest upon Him alone for salvation. Beholding Him as lifted up, we are healed. Looking to Him as "the Author and Finisher of faith," we lay aside every weight and every besetting sin, and run with patience our appointed race. The great truths exhibited in the sacrament of the Supper—a Divine Saviour, a substitutionary sacrifice, a complete atonement, the covenant ratified, a feast of spiritual blessings, and communion with God and with his people—must not only be believed but appropriated, if we would derive benefit from coming to this ordinance. These form the spiritual aliment of the soul; they are the provision of the banqueting-house; they are the dainties that are prepared for the marriage-supper of the King. Without a thorough conviction of our absolute need of them, without a relish for their enjoyment, without the heart delighting to feed upon them, we are disqualified for coming to the feast.

3. And, finally, the profession cannot be made and confirmed at the Lord's Supper, *without those dispositions of heart* which Divine truths, rightly believed, invariably produce. To make a profession of religion, we must know and believe what we profess. This profession is substantially that we renounce sin, accept of Christ as our only Saviour, love Him supremely, and serve Him with our whole hearts and lives. Faith, when genuine,

¹ John vii. 17.

² Is. liv. 13; 2 Cor. iv. 6.

purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world. The truths of the Gospel, when believed, affect the heart and lead to self-abasement, godly sorrow, and all the exercises of genuine repentance. Christ Jesus, exhibited in the excellency of his person, and the perfection of his sacrifice, appears an object all-lovely and attractive, and the heart is constrained to love Him. Gratitude, spiritual desire, and delight are experienced in embracing and resting on a Saviour and salvation suited to the sinner's necessity, and adequate to all his wants. These kindred graces, working within, will impel to holy obedience in the life. The heart, united and enlarged, will run in the way of the Divine commandments.

Without such qualifications, it must be evident that no part of the service required in the Lord's Supper can be rightly performed. We cannot commemorate Christ's wondrous sacrifice if we have not knowledge, faith, love, gratitude, and humility. His death cannot be showed forth without assured belief in the doctrine of his cross, and the *affection and delight* of the heart glorying in his finished work. And if the ordinance is a seal of the covenant of grace, and God in it promises to be our God, we on our part engage to be his people. But this we cannot do while we remain in love with sin, or submit not to Christ, or dislike the way of holy obedience. Without a sense of the need of pardon, a desire after holiness, sorrow for past transgressions, and a cordial purpose to cleave to the Lord, we cannot covenant with God, nor can we entertain right views and expectations in reference to forgiveness, satisfaction, and eternal life.

Two additional observations will suffice on this part of the subject. First. It is requisite to have faith and other holy dispositions *actually in exercise*, if we would derive spiritual benefit from coming to sealing ordinances. A gracious state constitutes *habitual preparation* for partaking in the Christian sacraments; the exercise of grace constitutes *actual preparation*. The "wise virgins" were acknowledged to be the Bridegroom's friends, even though in his absence "they slumbered and slept;" and they were prepared to meet Him, and were taken in with Him to the marriage, because they had oil in their vessels with their lamps, and had trimmed their lamps; because they were possessed of a principle of grace in the heart, and had it drawn forth to renewed exercise. The "foolish virgins," on the other hand, were rejected, though they had the name of virgins, and possessed lamps—though they made a profession, and were

in some concern to prepare to meet the Bridegroom—because they were destitute of such a principle. Without the graces of faith, and love, and repentance actually working in the heart, we cannot expect to meet the King at the feast ; we cannot seal our allegiance to Him, or share in the abundant provision of his house. If we come to the banqueting-house at all, we must come as the friends of Christ. Hating his enemies, and putting away from us all that He dislikes ; we must “ sit down under his shadow ” with delight, reposing our entire confidence in his person and salvation. Engaging to be his now and for ever, we must in love embrace Him, and with the satisfaction of the heart say, “ This is my Beloved and my Friend ; ” “ My Beloved is mine, and I am his.” Partaking of the bread of the family of God, and claiming fellowship with them, we must cherish the fervent love of the brethren ; our delight must be with the saints, “ the excellent of the earth.” And pledging to the Redeemer at his table, and over the symbols of his dying love, the homage of our hearts and lives, we should come to it, putting away all idols, and with the humble, resolute desire and purpose to keep all his commandments. With such dispositions and desires, we shall be welcome guests at the marriage feast ; and from the sacramental service we shall derive an increase of grace, and new and animating encouragements to pursue the path that leads to comfort and felicity.

Secondly. *The absence of these qualifications, or a sense of the want of them, we must bear in mind, will free no person from the obligation to obey the command of Christ, and to commemorate his death.* The command, “ *Do this in remembrance of me,*” is binding upon all Christ’s disciples. It is binding equally with any other requirement of his Word—such as to “ remember the Sabbath-day,” to sanctify it, or to do no murder ; and no plea of unfitness for the service can justify us in neglecting an ordinance which Christ, in the most affecting circumstances, appointed, and which is designed to subserve the most important and valuable purposes. If we are reluctant to make so public and explicit a profession as attendance upon this institution implies, we should remember that the very name of Christians which we bear, and attendance upon other ordinances of the sanctuary, involve the same profession. If we are unfit to approach the Lord’s table, we are unfit to live—we are unprepared to die. Living in unbelief and disobedience, we are under the wrath of God, and we are wholly unprepared to meet the Lord at his coming, to death and to judgment. Besides, we can perform

no other religious duty aright, without the dispositions of heart that are required as qualifications for partaking of the Lord's Supper. We cannot pray, or hear the Word, or do any work of acceptable obedience without faith, and penitence, and love. To be half-religious is to be irreligious. We cannot "halt between two opinions," or "serve two masters ;" and the notion, which we fear is extensively prevalent among the baptized youth of the Church, and with the mass of Christian professors, that we can possess Christian character and be safe, while the whole heart is not given to God, or that we may observe some religious institutions which are more common, and neglect others, because they are peculiarly solemn, is a fearful and fatal delusion. The truth is, that all the pleas that are advanced to excuse professing Christ, from commemorating his death, are futile and invalid. They proceed from the love of sin, and opposition of heart to submit to the authority of Christ, and secret dislike to his service. Those who make these, while they profess concern for preparation, and dread of coming unprepared, not unfrequently discover their dislike to vital piety, by living from year to year in the same neglect, showing no anxiety to possess the qualifications which they reckon so important, and sometimes abandoning, one after the other, the different parts of a religious profession. Their immediate duty is to repent and believe the Gospel. Without this, they are under God's wrath and curse, and are far from safety. But coming to Christ, as "weary and heavy-laden" sinners, and inclining their neck to the yoke of holy obedience, they will obtain all needful preparation for solemn duties. At the Lord's table, they will find acceptance; and nourished and strengthened by partaking in the feast of love, they will go on their way rejoicing. The declaration of the prophet, concerning reverential attendance upon the institutions of God's worship, and about doing his will, is emphatically true of this ordinance. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; they shall walk, and not faint." ¹

Such being the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, and such the obligations to observe it, need we employ arguments to induce the baptized youth of the Church to ratify their profession by an early attendance upon his holy institution? When the nature of the ordinance is understood, and opportunity of access to it is enjoyed, neglect of it must be viewed as

¹ Isaiah xl. 31.

a refusal to confess Christ before men, and as indicating disrelish and dislike to the blessed provision which the ordinance is appointed to be the means of communicating. Would you not be found chargeable with such a heinous offence? It will be your interest and privilege to avouch your baptismal covenant, by coming early to the Lord's table. In the purest and best days of the Church of Scotland, it was usual for the youth of the Church to make a profession of religion, by publicly entering the fellowship of the Church, and partaking of the Lord's Supper, at the age of *twelve* or *thirteen* years. Manifold advantages would still accrue to the youth of the Church, if they were prepared at a like early period thus to make a profession. The preparation required may be obtained by that time, equally as at a more advanced period of life; and there are various important advantages in seeking it, before youthful passions come into full exercise, and ere the young engage in the active business of life. The solemn views entertained in connection with the sacramental vow, the preparation essayed in self-examination—repentance, faith, meditation, and prayer, and the dedication implied in the service—are singularly useful to the young in the morning of life; while the spiritual benefits that are guaranteed to faithful communicants serve the most valuable purposes, in guarding them against numerous evils with which they are surrounded, and in preparing them for a career of future usefulness.¹ Let the young, therefore, seek early to enrol themselves among the sacramental host. Let them esteem it their highest honour to ratify at the Lord's table their profession of allegiance to Christ, and their fellowship with his people. All requisite qualifications are promised to those who are duly impressed with a sense of their importance, and who are in earnest in seeking them. There is something peculiarly lovely in the young coming forward publicly to enlist under the standard of the Captain of salvation. Proportioned to the sincerity of youthful dedication are the privileges which their exalted Leader confers upon them. He accepts of the kindness of their youth, and remembers with deepest interest the love of the espousals. He brings them into the banqueting-house—the place of his gracious presence, the scene of special Divine manifestations; and as they enjoy spiritual communion

¹ It is related in the *Memoirs of Frazer of Brac*—the most exact and scriptural analysis of spiritual frames and exercises in our language—that he was first awakened to a serious sense of his need of personal holiness by his proposal, when very young, to observe the Lord's Supper.

with Him, and in all their future services and conflicts and trials, "his banner over them is love." The youth of the Church are affectionately invited, and urged, from these considerations, to seek early this noble distinction. Yielding themselves to the Lord, and taking hold of his covenant, they will reap the benefits of decision in religion. They will experience the heart-satisfying pleasures of true devotedness; and future blessings will crown their lot, and attest, that in keeping God's commandments there is a great reward—"Them that honour me will I honour; but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."¹

¹ 1 Samuel ii. 30.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARACTER BEFITTING THOSE WHO HAVE MADE A PROFESSION OF RELIGION, AND WHO HAVE BEEN AT THE LORD'S TABLE.

THAT they who have named the name of Christ should "depart from iniquity," is the dictate of enlightened conscience, as well as of Divine revelation. A vow solemnly made to God in espousing a Christian profession, and in coming to the sacramental feast, ought to be fully paid; and sincerity in religion demands that we should not "defer" to pay it, and that the whole life should be consistent with the principles professed, and with the act of dedication that has been voluntarily made. Christians are called to the fellowship of the Gospel, that they may "shine as lights in the world." The disciples of Christ are under the most weighty obligations to exemplify the spirit and character of their blessed Lord; and when brought to the light of salvation, they are called "to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."

The young who have confessed Christ before men, and have sealed their profession by partaking of the Lord's Supper, need counsel with respect to their future conduct, for they are beset with numerous difficulties and dangers. If faithful to the blessed Master in whose service they have enlisted, they have, moreover, important duties to perform; and upon the character by which they are distinguished, and the spirit and deportment which they exhibit, interests of great magnitude are suspended. Much, very much, will depend upon the young being thoroughly aware of the obligations arising from a public profession, and from sacramental privileges, and upon the course which they adopt after they have been admitted to holy ordinances. The great enemy frequently makes his fiercest assaults upon Zion's travellers as they descend from the mount of special privileges. If he succeeds in leading young professors to rest satisfied with past attainments, or to forget speedily solemn impressions and vows, or to become formal and neglectful of important duties,

like too many who wear the Christian name, then the melancholy result may be easily predicted. The life will be unprofitable. The person may become a backslider or an apostate, and the termination may be confirmed impenitency, hardened infidelity, and deplorable self-deception. On the other hand, if the young, at this period, are rightly impressed, and adopt the course to which their profession and vows point them, they shall themselves realize many blessings; and their conduct and example will be the means of conferring numerous invaluable benefits upon others. Lengthened and somewhat extended observation has confirmed us in the opinion, that the period immediately after making a public profession of religion, and partaking of sealing ordinances, is one of peculiar temptation; and that, according to the views then entertained, and the course pursued, the person will either degenerate and bring reproach on religion, or advance in the Divine life, and become an instrument of blessing to the Church and the world. With such an impression, we would affectionately and earnestly warn the youthful professor against dangers to which he is exposed, and point out to him the way of peace and happiness. Our desire is to conduct him to a Guide who is perfectly acquainted with the way, a Leader who never deceives, a Guardian who is almighty to protect, a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. May He direct to suitable counsels, and may our young readers hear and obey the word of the faithful Shepherd !

SECT. I.—*Evils to be shunned—Views to be entertained.*

There are numerous evils which beset the Christian's step at every stage of his progress towards the heavenly country. Hence his path is likened to a *pilgrimage*, and his course is said to be through the wilderness. His work on earth is termed *a race, a warfare*; and he is admonished that he must run that he may obtain, that he must fight if he would grasp the palm of victory, and that it is incumbent on him at all times, "forgetting the things that are behind, to press to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ." Without a proper estimate of the dangers and difficulties of the journey, none will prosecute it aright. Insensible to the peculiar evils to which they are exposed, the young cannot be expected to encounter them with resolution and fortitude; and defeat and ruin will be the baleful consequences.

Without adverting to other evils which assail the young at other periods, some of which have already been mentioned, we notice—*the loss of serious impressions, forgetfulness or neglect of solemn vows, indecision in religion, conformity to the world, and backsliding*, as dangers to which youthful professors are peculiarly exposed; as evils of grievous magnitude, by which thousands have been overwhelmed, and involved in irremediable and hopeless ruin.

I. DECAY OF SERIOUS IMPRESSIONS.

Even those who have enjoyed distinguishing privileges are very prone to lose speedily solemn impressions, and to forget the vows that were uttered in the most affecting circumstances, and with apparent sincerity. Of this we have frequent mention in the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament. God often complains of this in the people of Israel; and their whole history furnishes many affecting and melancholy instances of their forgetfulness of God, and their constant tendency to relapse into apathy, indolence, and rebellion. After the most signal deliverances, when they had witnessed the most astonishing manifestations of the Divine hand, and had come under the most explicit and solemn engagements, they turned back as a bow that shoots deceitfully—their vows were neglected, they tempted God; and distrust, ingratitude, and disobedience characterized them. The instance so well selected by Saurin may be quoted, as illustrative of what frequently occurred in all periods of the history of the Jewish people:—

“The Church hath seldom seen happier days than those described in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. God had never diffused his benediction on a people in richer abundance. Never had a people expressed gratitude more lively, piety more fervent. The Red Sea had been passed; Pharaoh and his insolent court were buried in the waves; access to the land of promise was opened; Moses had been admitted to the holy mountain to derive felicity from God, the Source, and sent to distribute it amongst his countrymen: to these choice favours, promises of new and greater blessings yet were added; and God said, ‘Ye have seen what I have done unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, although all the earth be mine.’ The

people were deeply affected with this collection of miracles. Each individual entered into the same views, and seemed animated with the same passion ; all hearts were united, and one voice expressed the sense of all the tribes of Israel : 'All that the Lord hath spoken we will do !' But this devotion had one great defect—it *lasted only forty days*. In forty days, the deliverances out of Egypt, the catastrophe of Pharaoh, the passage of the Red Sea, the articles of the covenant ; in forty days, promises, vows, oaths, all were effaced from the heart, and forgotten. Moses was absent, the lightning did not glitter, the thunder-claps did not roar, and the Jews made a calf in Horeb, worshipped that molten image, and changed their glorious God into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass."

That such conduct was very displeasing to God, and injurious to the Israelites themselves, the sacred writers frequently declare. "They have well said all that they have spoken. Oh, that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever." "They forgot God their Saviour, which had done great things in Egypt." "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."¹ This, indeed, was the great reason why severe judgments were frequently sent to punish Israel's waywardness and rebellion. For this they were sold into the hand of various powerful oppressors, and the glory departed.

Nor should it be believed that such conduct was only exemplified during an imperfect and comparatively dark dispensation. The disciples of Christ, even while their Lord was with them on earth, forgot his miracles, distrusted his power, and acted unworthily of their profession and privileges. The same night witnessed the solemn profession of the ardent apostle, "*Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee,*" and his deplorable fall. We have, alas ! too many examples of the transient nature of religious impressions among professors in our own day. They are betimes greatly affected ; they have joys or sorrows on religious subjects very deep and absorbing. In their own apprehension, they have obtained entirely new views and feelings ; and under such impressions, they form resolutions, from which they think it impossible that they should ever recede. They come to the Lord's table, and they give themselves to the Lord, with much apparent earnestness and cordiality ; and, for

¹ Deut. v. 29 ; Ps. cvi. 21 ; Hosea vi. 4.

the time, they imagine that henceforth they shall never go back. How lamentable is it, that such impressions speedily prove themselves to be transient, like "the morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth away !" The Lord's affecting complaint about his ancient people is too truly applicable to many young professors in our day: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown."¹ The kindness of youth is speedily forgotten ; the love of espousals has waned, and difficulties in following religion are magnified ; while ease is courted, pleasure pursued, or lukewarmness and formality reign in the heart. Against such a course, we would affectionately and solemnly warn youthful professors. The decay of religious impressions either springs from an unrenewed heart, or indicates a yielding to an insidious and powerful temptation. The seed sown upon "stony ground" sprung up rapidly ; but, having no root, it "withered away," and brought forth no fruit. To be impressed for a season with the terrors of the Lord, and not subdued ; to have fears awakened that do not conduct to the Gospel refuge, and that promote not sanctification ; and to be affected with the manifestations of Divine love, and not experience its constraining and transforming power, is fearfully dangerous. Impressions that result in no permanent salutary effects tend to harden. The person who has been the subject of them becomes callous and insensible, and is not unfrequently given over to the spirit of spiritual slumber and indifference. Transient devotions and vows neglected serve to strengthen the unbelief of the heart ; they tend to confirm others in their neglect of religion, and in formality ; and, in some instances, they have been known to land individuals in the gulph of despair. Few states are, indeed, more to be dreaded in the early stages of a religious profession. As among men, if, after warm professions of friendship, we treat a person with neglect or unkindness or insult, we are prone to shun his company, and to think he will not forgive us ; so when religious impressions are not retained in their vigour, and vows to God are violated, we are tempted to become aliens from God, or to despair of pardoning mercy. In both cases, the effects are most disastrous. To this may be traced so much unfruitfulness among professors ; and hence flows, too, what is frequently to be observed and lamented in the Church-- the want of consistency and steady progress among the members of the Church. The effect upon

¹ Jeremiah ii. 2.

others is most injurious. It is like the Israelitish spies, bringing up an evil report of the promised land. Many are discouraged ; some are led to entertain prejudices against religion, and are confirmed in ungodliness. Such a case is, besides, utterly incompatible with the possession of true religious comfort ; progress in the Divine life cannot be made, while solemn impressions are not retained, and the assured hope of salvation can never be reached.

In view of such dangers, young professors are earnestly entreated to watch and pray against declension of first love, and against forgetfulness of vows. Let them fear lest they thus fall into the snare of the destroyer. Examine anew and carefully, after making a profession and enjoying sealing ordinances, the state and frame of the heart, and the motives that actuate the conduct. Consider seriously the position that has been assumed, its solemn responsibilities, and the high and important duties to which it imperatively calls. Spread out before the Lord the vows that have been made, and enter at once upon paying them. Take anew the "cup of salvation," and call upon God ; and receiving grace from Him who is always able and willing to confer it, enter with alacrity upon a course of new obedience, and prosecute it with vigour. Beware of harbouring, however secretly, any besetting sin, and guard with holy watchful jealousy against the first appearance of decayed love. Much fervent prayer is needful to preserve you from the wiles of the adversary, and to draw down into your souls quickening influence from on high. Ask that gracious Spirit who alone can sanctify, and who will preserve you from falling. It was faith, one of the principal graces, that made all right impressions at first, and that excited to proper vows ; and this holy principle, renewed and strengthened, can uphold and settle you. You should look habitually to Jesus, "the Author and Finisher of faith." Frequently should you importune Him as did the disciples, "*Lord, increase our faith.*" Thus will you vanquish the temptation to become cold and negligent ; you will be preserved from declension ; having made vows, you will be enabled each day to perform them, and you will be made "steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord."

2. INDECISION IN RELIGION—CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

Again, *indecision in religion, and conformity to the world*, are evils that have a fatal and extensive influence upon many who

have made a religious profession. They are convinced in their hearts that Christ and his service should be to them "all and in all," and that they should be wholly the Lord's. Their purpose has been, whatever others do, they will serve the Lord; and persuaded that religion must either be everything, or that it is nothing, they have resolved to discard low aims and worldly considerations, and henceforth to live not to themselves, but to Christ, as their glorious and only Master. Alas! that such resolutions should be so evanescent. Descending from the mount of privilege to the world, they breathe its infected atmosphere, the hand becomes palsied, and purposes of good are left unexecuted. Overlooking the paramount claims of religion, they become conformed to the world; and, like many nominal professors, they hesitate when they should act with decision, they make excuses where none are admissible, they are satisfied with a low standard of religious practice, and refuse to come up to the full measure of Christian character and obedience. Such persons, like Israel in Elijah's days, "halt between two opinions;" or, like Agrippa—who, notwithstanding his candour and uprightness as a judge, and his convictions from the apostle's reasoning, remained in unbelief—"they are *almost* persuaded to be Christians."

Such a state of mind arises from a variety of causes. Some have no just ideas of the importance of Divine things, and never seriously consider the consequences of their conduct in regard to religion. Others are under the dominion of some besetting sin. Some dread the ridicule and reproach of singularity and decision in religion; with many there is a continual looking to the example or approbation of others, rather than the diligent study of the requirements and model presented in the Sacred Scriptures. "They love the praise of men more than the praise of God." They are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." The fruits of such indecision and worldly conformity are evil, and most pernicious. The Saviour has, in the plainest terms, inculcated upon all his disciples full decision and entire devotedness, and has appended to his commands on this article the most solemn sanctions, "Choose ye whom ye will serve." "Ye cannot serve two masters." "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."¹ The most attractive examples, likewise,

¹ Mark viii. 38.

are held forth in the Bible, of those who rose above the common standard of their age, and were decided on the Lord's side. Caleb "followed the Lord fully," and God owned him as his servant, and gave to him and his posterity the land in inheritance. Joshua, when in old age, declared, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Elijah was faithful amidst a nation's apostasy, and the Lord honoured his decision before his enemies, and crowned him with a glorious reward. Why should we extend the enumeration? This has been the way of all God's approved servants. They have aimed to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. Solemn resolutions, formed in Divine strength, they have endeavoured at once to carry into accomplishment; and dreading the danger of irresolution and worldly conformity, they have "pressed forward to the mark of the prize of their high calling," and have laid hold on eternal life.

Thus, too, must you act, if you would enjoy the light of God's countenance, and follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The evils of indecision you should seriously consider. At once unreasonable and contemptible, it is palpably opposed to the whole portraiture of the Christian life exhibited in the Word, and it is uncomfortable and dangerous. The business of religion is, in the fullest sense, a "*reasonable service*;" and to withhold from it the entire consecration of the heart and life is as irrational as it is wicked. Interests of the highest moment are suspended upon the choice made and the conduct pursued. Life and death, blessing and a curse, are proposed, and the person is indispensably required to choose and act. Indecision and neutrality are not *negative* states merely. In the estimate of Him with whom we have to do, they are tantamount to a complete rejection of his service, and the denial of his name. "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." In matters of great moment, to be irresolute and undecided indicates mental imbecility, and is pitiable as well as unreasonable. Success in the pursuit of any object may never be expected in this way. The curse of Reuben is upon the wavering and undecided—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." This state is, moreover, inconsistent with real peace and assured comfort. Fluctuating between conviction and irresolution, wavering amidst unexecuted purposes, the individual, if not utterly callous, must at times endure mental torture, and conscience will inflict its direst stings. A condition of this

kind, how undesirable for life, how dangerous and miserable to meet death, and to enter eternity in! Of some the poet's declaration is sadly true,

"They resolve, and re-resolve, and die the same."

From such a state of mind let it be your study to be completely freed. Shun, as most dangerous, all that irresolution in purpose, and wavering and indecision in conduct, which characterize so many in the things of religion. Having made your choice, and adopted your course, follow it resolutely, steadily, constantly. "*Onward and upward*" must always be the motto of the Christian course. "So run that ye may obtain," is the command laid upon him at all times, absolutely precluding all indecision, and calling to sustained exertion. May your whole conduct testify that you have fully felt its obligation! May you hearken, believe, and obey; and may yours be the comfort and happiness of those who yield themselves to the Lord, and who press to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

3. BACKSLIDING.

Lastly. You should guard against all *Backsliding*, as an evil very common, heinous in its nature, and of most pernicious tendency. This evil is insidious, and assumes many deceitful forms; but, in all cases, it is directly opposed to a proper profession of religion, and the consequences to which it leads are disastrous. There is backsliding in heart when the person hankers after forbidden enjoyments, or after objects which he professed to forsake for ever; when purposes solemnly formed are forgotten; and when fervent desires become languid and cold, and religious duties are either neglected or performed without a devotional spirit. In all such cases "the plague is begun," and nothing but wakeful vigilance, solemn consideration, and a hearty return to the Lord, will prevent its destructive progress. It has been properly said, that backsliding begins at the heart and in the closet; and secret backsliding, when indulged in, most generally manifests itself in open apostasy. A lively devotional frame is exchanged for a worldly, lukewarm spirit; private prayer is occasionally neglected, or observed in a formal, lifeless manner, and the individual becomes tired of other parts of a religious service, and invents plausible excuses for neglecting them. By-and-by, he leaves off to do good—not unfrequently

lays aside the mask of a profession, which at best was worn only to deceive, and sometimes sits down in the chair of the scorner. It is unnecessary to depict the complicated evils of such a course, or the dreadful final condition of the backslider. Suffice it to say, that the decisive testimony of the Spirit of truth is, "*The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.*"¹ Backsliding in heart goes out into apostasy in conduct, and the backslider eats the fruit of his doings in judgments that overtake him here and hereafter. Watch, then, with the utmost vigilance against the beginnings of this evil. Be in dread when the edge of religious duties is, in the least degree, blunted; when the affections to spiritual things become cold or lukewarm; and when any part of the business of religion is felt to be irksome or wearisome. The least approach to such a state is dangerous, and the most fearful warnings are presented in the Word to guard the entrance of the backslider. "If any man draw back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him."² All drawing back, all receding from a profession and from solemn vows, incurs the risk of perdition. It is a step in a downward descent; and, if persevered in, return becomes more and more difficult; and God is provoked to give over the person to perpetual backsliding. Against an evil of such magnitude, let the youthful professor watch and pray continually. His only way of safety is to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, to dread the least appearance of evil, to practise frequently a diligent self-scrutiny, and to guard against whatever would withdraw the heart from God, or from the spirituality of religious duties. It has been well said that, in the Christian warfare, "no armour is provided for the back; and he that would enjoy the conqueror's crown, and wave at last the victor's palm, must habitually remember that there is no discharge in that war, and that the least inaction or neutrality, if it does not forfeit the victory, will give an advantage to the enemy, which he will not be slow to improve, to the injury and disgrace of the soldier of the cross."

Other evils incident to youth—those to which they are exposed from inexperience and from peculiar temptations—will be avoided by a habit of continued watchfulness and prayer; and above all, by adhering closely to the Captain of salvation, and by depending on Him entirely for grace sufficient. "Without me," says the Saviour, "ye can do nothing." Without his blessing, you are and must be miserable; without his gracious

¹ Proverbs xiv. 14.

² Hebrews x. 38.

protection, you cannot enjoy a moment's safety. If, on the other hand, you seek his face continually, and rely upon his protection and guidance, He will be your shield against all dangers. He will unstring the numerous evils which you may have to encounter, and render you at length victorious over them all. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who leads and feeds his people all their life—the Angel who redeems them from all evil. Depending on his promise and grace, and living near Him, you will be enabled to say, as the venerable Apostle of the Gentiles, when he was a confessor and suffering witness for the truth, "*Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me;*" and anticipating with joyful confidence the future, you will declare, "*The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.*"¹

SECT. II.—*The pursuit of Religion the grand business of Life.*

When our blessed Saviour warns his disciples against undue anxiety about the things of the present life, He gives this plain and comprehensive direction, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."² Without adverting to other matters that are included in this beautiful precept, it evidently implies that religion is to be regarded as the principal business of human life. It enjoins those to whom it is addressed to choose heaven as their end, and holiness as their way. This they are to prefer to all other objects and interests. Here they are deliberately to place their chief felicity, and to seek it by the most careful concern and earnest endeavour. This they are emphatically enjoined to "seek first." It must be esteemed as the first and best object, in itself all valuable and excellent, and apart from which nothing is desirable. The care for God's honour and the soul's salvation must take precedence of all other cares—to it all the concerns of this life are to be subordinated. The interests of the Saviour's glory are to be sought more than our own things. They are to have the preference to all that ever comes in competition with them; and all else is to be cheerfully sacrificed to secure their possession. The kingdom of God and his righteousness are to be sought with the prime affections and desires of the heart. The morning of youth should be dedicated to their pursuit; and

¹ 2 Timothy iv. 17, 18.

² Matthew vi. 33.

these substantial and blessed realities ought to enlist the first thoughts and activities of every period of life ; and their attainment should be the chief element in every plan of conduct, in all that engages the attention or calls forth exertion. The gracious and ample assurance offered for outward provision stands in this connection alone. All things needful for the body, all that pertains to a comfortable blessed lot in life, "shall be added" to those who walk in the way of holy obedience. Nothing is promised to any human being out of this order. But in choosing and following it, there is the securest guarantee that "bread shall be given and water made sure;" that "what is good the Lord will give;" and that nothing really good shall be withholden.

This important precept speaks with peculiar significance and application to the baptized youth of the Church, and especially to such as have made a visible profession of religion, and have partaken of the Lord's Supper. If conduct has any meaning, they have declared that religion is to them all; that they prefer the service of Christ to that of every other master; and that in it they seek all their honour and happiness. The remembrance of their own voluntary profession demands that they seek first, and with all diligence and constancy, the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Moreover, the young naturally have their thoughts and anxieties exercised betimes about the things of this present life. The youthful mind is forecasting of the future. Provision for the body, the relations to be formed in life, and the pleasures desired or expected, engage their thoughts or excite their imagination. Hope clothes the scene with its pleasing illusions, or clouds damp their ardour, and lead to despondency. The precept to which we have referred supplies an effectual antidote to vain hopes on the one hand, and to undue depression on the other. The ascended Redeemer, who is "Heir of all things," has infallibly assured us, that in making religion the grand pursuit, there shall be no want of outward provision. Seeking spiritual blessings, we shall find them; and, "over and above," there shall be given food and raiment, comfortable relations, a sanctified lot, and many sources of outward enjoyment and satisfaction.

In urging the young to make religion the principal business of life, it is not necessary, in this place, to define wherein true religion consists, or to describe its nature. Those whom we address are supposed to have acquired some knowledge on the subject. They are acquainted with religion as implying the

obligation of the soul and of the whole man to God, a right disposition of heart towards the object of worship, and the manifestation of this disposition in acts of spiritual devotion, and in the universal obedience of the life. And they have been taught that such a spirit and conduct can only be produced by the operation of the Spirit of God ; that it results from the great internal change which He alone can effect. It is possible, however, to admit these truths, and to have correct speculative views concerning the nature of true religion, and even to make a strict religious profession, and yet be far from recognizing religion as the great concern of life. Some through utter thoughtlessness, others from loose sentiments ; some from aversion of heart, and numbers from following the multitude, shift aside the claims of religion, or yield to them but an occasional or passing tribute of respect ; while other matters chiefly occupy their thoughts, and command their attention. With many professors, religion is a business to be entirely separated from the ordinary pursuits of life. It is to be attended to on the Sabbath, or is the work of the public assembly ; it may occupy shreds of time, after the concerns of the world have engrossed the principal part of every day ; and it is suitable for seasons of disappointment, and affliction, and death, when submission to calamity, and the thought of the soul, and of God, and eternity, appear to be inevitable. It need not surely be declared how erroneous are such views, or how unreasonable and infatuated is such conduct. *Religion, if it is anything, must be everything.* It must mingle in all our concerns, and control and direct all our pursuits, else we are still in rebellion against its authority, and can know none of its rich consolations and heavenly hopes. We must *strive* to enter in at "the strait gate," and to walk in "the narrow way," if we would enjoy eternal life. *Pressing into the kingdom*, is the irreversible law of its possession. It is the greatest folly to think that this striving and pressing is an exercise only for some rare or great occasions. It is designed to be the business of every day and hour of life. All other affairs must be postponed to it ; or, to speak more properly, every other engagement must be brought to subserve this grand and momentous pursuit.

Thoughtlessness on this subject is not to be ascribed to the mere levity of youth. It is the saddest moral infatuation. What ! to think little on matters that concern your present existence, preservation, and happiness ; that concern God's character, claims, and glory, the soul's eternal destinies, and

that are indispensable to the performance of all duties that relate to God and man. This is to degrade the moral and intellectual nature; and instead of acting like a rational and accountable being, it is to sink down to the level of the beasts that perish. Aversion to religion, however secret, and perverted sentiments in relation to it, cannot excuse or palliate the fault. On the contrary, it greatly aggravates it. "They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be made manifest."¹ Dislike to the claims of religion, or to any of its duties, evidences a corrupt and perverted state of the moral nature. It is aversion to all that is lovely and excellent; it is rebellion against Him whose authority over us is sovereign and irresistible, and upon whom we are absolutely, and at every moment, dependent. Wrong sentiments, and foolish notions in religion, proceed from "an evil heart of unbelief," that leads to departure from the living God. These aggravate the sin of neglecting religion now; and it should always be borne in mind, that hereafter you will be judged, not by what you have thought or believed, but by what God has plainly declared. "His Word is for ever settled in the heavens." The concurrent testimony of every part of Divine revelation is, that "to fear God and to keep his commandments is the whole duty," work, and interest "of man;" and all principles and conduct that are opposed to this must be regarded as direct hostility to the truth, power, and authority of God, excluding from his favour, and consigning over to the woes of a ruined eternity. May we not conclude, then, in the language of an eloquent writer:—

"Religion is not a subject to be trifled with; it is not a subject to be rejected with aversion or dislike. It comes to you as a message from heaven; it comes to make you holy and happy; to raise you into a resemblance to your Creator, and meetness for his presence; and it is your highest interest, as it is your most important duty, to welcome this religion to your bosom, as the sweetest solace of life, and the richest inheritance of the soul."²

To neglect religion, or to yield to it only an occasional and divided homage, because this is the way of multitudes, or because its power is so little manifested in the lives of pro-

¹ John iii. 19, 20.

² Hawies's *Lectures to Young Men on the Formation of Character*, Lect. v. p. 57—Glasgow edition.

fessors, is a grievous mistake and a fatal temptation. We must not go with a multitude to do evil; and it is an evil of the worst kind to follow the example of the irreligious, or of the lukewarm and hypocritical, in opposition to the plain and pointed requirements of the inspired Word. Religion is no vain thing, even though its professed friends neglect it, or prefer other things in its stead. You must be content to be singular, and to separate even from the dearest friends, if their example would tempt you to undervalue its claims. In the appropriate language of the writer we have just quoted—

“Religion, in its truth and importance, is not affected in the least either by the neglect of the worldly, or the sins of the hypocritical, or the imperfections of the pious. It stands as clear from all connection with these, as ‘the Spirit that pervades all things is pure from matter and from sin.’ It is not the less worthy of your reception, nor the less imperious in its claims, because many around you neglect it, and others who profess it appear to be destitute of its spirit and power. The simple question is, ‘Is religion a reality; is it founded in truth; does God require me to love and serve Him; does He command me to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and has He suspended the salvation of my soul in obedience to this command?’ If this be admitted, it is nothing to me if all the world neglect religion. This is a personal concern. It has nothing to do either with the impenitence of those who are out of the Church, or the hypocrisy of those who are in it. *They* are to give account unto God, each one for himself. And so are we. On the great day of the Lord, it will not save *you*, nor *me*, that others neglected religion. Each will stand or fall by himself, and each receive, in his own person, the joyous or dread reward of eternal life or eternal death.”¹

Having thus shown you the folly and wickedness of neglecting religion, or of giving to its duties a secondary attention, we will not wait to show that to make religion a paramount concern is imperatively enjoined; that this, in the fullest sense, is your reasonable service; and that it is conducive to your true dignity and happiness. Of all this the reader of the Scriptures must be persuaded, whether he follows the course which his convictions point out or not; and of those who make a public profession, and ratify it by the sacramental vow, there are few, it is likely, who have not, at least, *temporary convictions* of this kind. Aware of your temptations and dangers, notwithstanding, to

¹ Hawies's *Lectures*, p. 53.

make religion, as others do, a matter of inferior moment, we venture to offer you briefly, *Three Counsels*.

First. *Learn habitually to regard God's glory and your soul's salvation as a subject of supreme importance.* This you must regard as your chief end. Labour to secure it, whatever else you neglect or pursue after. This should occupy the uppermost place in your thoughts, and affections, and plans, and be the principal business of every day. For this you should live, as to secure these high ends you should be willing to die. Your baptism, your profession, your voluntary vows, all bind you to make this your grand business. You should always hold yourselves prepared to do God's work, whatever else may be left undone ; and to all solicitations from within or without to relax your exertions, or turn aside, you must resolutely oppose the purpose of good Nehemiah, "*I am engaged in a great work, and I cannot come down.*" Remember, to you this is "one thing needful," the great subject of overwhelming and everlasting moment. Let your whole spirit and conduct bear testimony that you so esteem it, and you will thus walk worthy of your high vocation, overcome powerful temptations, and lay hold on eternal life.

Secondly. *Let true religion have a commanding influence upon all your other engagements and employments.* To the Christian, "everything is sanctified by the Word and by prayer." The proper office of religion is to renew and elevate the moral nature, to furnish new and pure motives for every part of the conduct, to control and direct the whole man, and to reduce all into subjection to the obedience of Christ. No mistake can be greater or more fatal than that of confining its dominion or influence to particular times, of shutting it up to the sanctuary or the Sabbath, and of excluding it from the daily pursuits and enjoyments of life. Beware of this very common and very dangerous temptation. Take true religion with you into all your affairs. Act in everything on religious principles and motives ; and while you study to subordinate all to your grand pursuit, conduct yourself, in matters of inferior moment, as under the All-seeing Eye, and as one that must give account. The walk of faith, from which the Christian is never at liberty for a moment to deviate, is in everything that calls forth the energies of mind or body. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Common actions will thus be elevated and ennobled ; and from the fountain healed, life-giving and refreshing streams will flow forth to purify the whole conduct, and to diffuse health and fertility around. Relative duties will

be faithfully performed, from a principle of love to God, and from a spirit of universal benevolence. So will you keep a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man; and religion will appear in its beautiful and attractive aspect,—the child of God, the friend of man, and the guide to all real and substantial happiness here and hereafter.

Lastly. *Religion, you must always recollect, as it merits the highest regard, so it claims your immediate attention.* All delay is dangerous, and, in many cases, it is ruinous. God's time is the present. "*To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*"¹ All deferring the concerns of God's glory, and of the soul's salvation, has a hardening tendency. It multiplies obstacles to a future return to God; renders more hopeless the attainment of the joys of salvation; and casts a deeper gloom over the prospects for eternity. Aim, then, to be *just now* what God requires, what his unerring Word represents as essential to acceptable obedience and happiness. Study to reach fully a high standard of moral excellence; and lay yourselves out thoroughly to do the work of God with all your might. To you the present is emphatically "the accepted time, and the day of salvation." Means of grace are multiplied, and opportunities of improvement and usefulness for the young are increased, beyond example in any former period. Some of this class, in various places, are presenting shining examples of Christian devotedness. We affectionately urge you now to be decided, to make religion your grand business, and to seek in its cultivation your present and highest enjoyments. Discard at once, and for ever, the deceptive purpose of being more devoted to religion, at some future period, than at present. Venture your all upon Christ and his service; or, rather, surrender up all to Him; for there is no venture, as there can be no loss in his service. Let this principle regulate all your relations, and influence all your conduct, to act in religion this moment as if the next you were to be called to give in your final account. What your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no thought, or purpose, or device in the grave, whither we hasten. Thus may you receive the exalted approval and commendation of the best of Masters, "*She hath done what she could.*" From his hand you will receive the blessing. He will render you a blessing to others; and He will confer on you at last the glorious reward which true religion always brings—"a crown of life which fadeth not away."

¹ Hebrews iii. 15.

SECT. III.—*The daily prayerful study of the Scriptures.*

It is the distinguished commendation of Timothy—"And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."¹ This declares an eminent attainment; and, taken in connection with "the unfeigned faith" of Timothy's mother and grandmother, and his usefulness and devotedness in the ministry of the Gospel, it furnishes a fine illustration of the advantages of parental piety and early religious instruction, and of their connection with singular ministerial success. Of the baptized youth of the Church, we might naturally expect to hear a similar commendation. Parents are under the most solemn obligations to teach them early the knowledge of Divine things. The sacred oracles are put into their hands; in childhood, they frequently acquire an acquaintance with the contents of the Bible; and previously to their making a profession, they are supposed to have known the leading truths of revelation. These are no mean advantages; and if duly appreciated and improved, they confer benefits which cannot be derived from acquaintance with any other book in the world. The Scriptures are God's Word: they reveal his glorious character, and man's condition and destiny; they disclose a wonderful method of setting him free from the curse which his sins have incurred, and of introducing him to happiness here and hereafter. They are able to make him "*wise unto salvation.*" They are the infallible directory of faith and practice. They teach man what he is to believe on all subjects that concern his dearest interests, and they instruct him what to do. The Scriptures supply the food for his soul, the balm of his spirit, and the charter of all his hopes. The Bible well deserves the recommendation which was uttered by the celebrated Locke, shortly before his death—"IT HAS GOD FOR ITS AUTHOR; SALVATION FOR ITS END; AND TRUTH, WITHOUT ANY MIXTURE OF ERROR, FOR ITS MATTER."²

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 15.

² The well-known lines of Sir Walter Scott express the manner in which the Bible is ever to be regarded:—

"Within that awful volume lies
The mystery of mysteries!
Happiest they of human race,
To whom God has granted grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,
To lift the latch, and force the way.
And better had they ne'er been born,
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn."

Notwithstanding, however, the excellency of the Scriptures, and the advantages enjoyed by Christian youth in having them early put into their hands, there is reason to fear that the Bible is comparatively a neglected book, even by many who make a profession of religion. Such is the tendency of our corrupt nature, that the commonness of our blessings frequently lessen, in our minds, a sense of their importance. As the air that we breathe, though indispensable to life, and food, and moisture, though essential to nourishment, are undervalued while we enjoy them ; so the precious Word of God, without which the life of the soul cannot be begun or prolonged, is frequently possessed without being studied ; its vastly important designs are overlooked ; and it is not applied to practical purposes. It is owing, in a great measure, to this neglect, that so little impression of God, speaking in his Word, is felt upon the heart and conscience, by many who are within the pale of the visible Church ; that reference to the unalterable rule of duty is so habitually neglected ; and that so many Christians make little progress in the Divine life, and know little of the strong consolations of true religion. Need we wonder at this, so long as the Bible is neglected—so long as it is not employed for the ends for which its Divine Author communicated it to men ? It is the Lamp of life ; and if men do not walk by it, they must walk in darkness. It is the food of the heart ; and while this heavenly provision is refused, there can be nothing but leanness to the soul. It is the perfect rule of faith and practice ; and if conformity to it is not studied, the views will be confused or erroneous, and the conduct irregular and disorderly. And without a firm trust in the sure word of promise, there can be no solid and cheering hope. Like the mariner without a compass, or without a secure anchorage in a storm, the person who does not employ the Scriptures as the pole-star of life, and who has not his hopes founded on the truth of religion, may expect to be exposed to dangers of every kind, seen and unseen, and in peril of final destruction.¹

1. DIRECTIONS FOR STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES.

To escape this ruin, to walk worthy of a Christian profession,

¹ "I have many books that I can sit down to read ; they are indeed good and sound ; but, like halfpence, there goes a great quantity to a little amount. There are silver books, and a very few gold books ; but I have one book worth them all, called the Bible, and that is a book of bank-notes."—*John Newton*.

to make progress in holiness, and to realize substantial and enduring hopes, one direction is all-important :—

FOLLOW CONSTANTLY THE DAILY PRAYERFUL STUDY OF GOD'S WORD. Without this you cannot make proficiency in what has been termed "the most excellent of the sciences"—the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; and you will not grow in grace. Through habitual converse with the Word of God, your views of Divine things will become clearer and more fixed ; your affections will be raised to things above. You will be led to calm and assured confidence in Him whose glory beams in every page of Revelation ; and through the work of the blessed Spirit, whose grand instrument is the Word, you will advance to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Earnestly desiring that this may be your character and attainment, we exhort you—

First. *To cultivate the habit of solemnly reading, every day, a portion of the Holy Scriptures.* Whatever other books you read let this be the chief. Let it occupy the largest portion of the time which you devote to reading ; and whatever be your engagements, you should redeem time for this purpose. Here you will find heavenly *manna*—the food of the spiritual life—and you should go forth into the field of Holy Scripture, and gather it fresh every morning. The Psalmist's account, in the first psalm, of the man who is "perfectly blessed" is, that "his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Perfect felicity is not attainable in any other way. Adopt this course, and, under Divine guidance, you cannot miss it. In this path the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err. Other books may be read and studied, as illustrating the Sacred Word, and quickening the desire after it ; and they are to be laid aside when they are in danger of engrossing the attention or of causing the Book of God to be disrelished or neglected. The learned Salmasius said on his death-bed—"I have lost a world of time ; had I to begin life again, I would spend much of my time in reading David's psalms, and Paul's epistles." The excellent Philip Henry presented an example worthy of imitation when he said—"I read other books that I may be the better able to understand the Scriptures." And it is testified of one who was a profound scholar, and the most devoted of modern missionaries, Henry Martyn—"So deep was his veneration for the Word of God, that, when a suspicion arose in his mind that any other book he might be studying was about to

gain an undue influence on his affections, he instantly laid it aside, nor would he resume it till he had felt and realized the paramount excellence of the Divine oracles. He could not rest satisfied till all those lesser lights that were beginning to dazzle him had disappeared before the effulgence of the Scriptures."¹

These instances, and similar examples have been exhibited by all "the excellent of the earth," who have followed the guidance of the star of revelation to the regions of perfect day, are worthy of your imitation. The Word of God is to be taken for constant direction, and used for daily food. In it the Great Prophet is constantly speaking to us on themes the most interesting and momentous, and we ought ever to hear and obey Him. It has been remarked, as a singular proof of Divine wisdom and condescension in giving the Scriptures, that the *size* of the Bible is such as to fit it for universal perusal. While the written laws of so small a spot of the world as England are contained in some *fifty folio volumes*—and few men, even in the course of a lifetime, can hope to be fully acquainted with them—the Statute-book of heaven, designed for all nations, and to be of use in all ages, is of such dimensions, that by reading a few chapters daily, it may be read through more than once in the course of a year. God's design in communicating such a revelation of his will to man was, that it should be frequently consulted; and none of the great objects which it is intended to subvert can be gained without referring to it constantly. It is our highest interest, as well as our imperative duty, to make the Word of God our daily companion.²

Secondly. *The Scriptures are not merely to be read—they should be the subjects of study and meditation.* The Saviour's impressive and pointed direction is, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."³ The term is borrowed from the practice of *miners*,

¹ *Martyn's Life*, p. 59.

² Dr Samuel Johnson gave the following advice to a young man who visited him on his death-bed—"Read the Bible every day of your life." M. De Renty, a French nobleman, is said to have cultivated the habit of reading three chapters of the Bible every day with his head uncovered, and on his bended knees. Dr M'Crie relates of John Knox, the illustrious Scottish Reformer—"It had been his ordinary practice to read every day some chapters of the Old and New Testament; to which he added a certain number of the Psalms of David, the whole of which he perused regularly once a month."—*M'Crie's Life of Knox*, p. 338. Sir Matthew Hale said, that if he did not honour God's Word by reading a portion of it every morning, things went not well with him all the day.

³ John v. 39.

and implies frequent trial, and diligent and laborious investigation. It is searching to discover something of great value, the person esteeming all his toil well rewarded if, after much pains, he discovers the precious ore. Such ought to be our study of the Holy Scriptures. We should avoid, above all things, the desultory, careless reading of God's Word. Remembering who is its glorious Author, and for what important purposes it has been given to us, we must aim, in perusing it, to acquire more than notional views, or to deposit it only in the memory. We must search the Word as for hid treasure, we must dig deep into the mine of inspired truth. Comparing things spiritual with spiritual, and taking one part of the Word as the interpreter of another; and above all, seeking a personal interest and portion in the great things which God has revealed, we shall advance in Divine knowledge, and obtain the light which, while it enlarges the intellect, sanctifies the heart. The young who have made a profession of religion should regard themselves as having thereby entered as pupils in Christ's school, and the whole future life should be one of diligent study and progressive learning. As the excellent Jonathan Edwards resolved, so should they endeavour, "to grow sensibly every day in the knowledge of God's will as revealed in the Scriptures." This study should not be confined to small or favourite portions of the Word of God. If we would find the all-enriching treasure, "our research should compass, as far as possible, the whole extent of the mine." The diffusion of important truth over the whole surface of Scripture, instead of systematic arrangement, shows the need of diligent study, as it is best fitted for instruction. The method which God has chosen to communicate his will to men, is calculated to reprove and deter the indolent; it is best fitted to excite to persevering research, and to reward the industrious. Let the young, then, labour to gain a fuller acquaintance with the Sacred Oracles every succeeding day of their lives. While they search after the mind of the Spirit speaking in the Word, let them, by reflection and meditation, rest and feed upon the great truths of revelation. The inspired direction to the rulers in Israel¹ is still applicable to the youth of the Church, and is to them of the highest importance. By spiritual meditation, they will secure as their own what they acquire by reading; the food derived from the Word will be digested and converted into spiritual nourishment; the heart will be elevated and enlarged with the contemplation of Divine

¹ Joshua i. 8.

mysteries ; and the student of the Word will assume a higher rank in the scale of rational and immortal beings. As with the Bereans of old, the daily study of the Word will supply a patent of true nobility,¹ as it will inspire the heart with imperishable hopes and blissful prospects. The duties and trials of every day require this habitual study of the Word ; and the true spiritual enjoyments of the Christian all flow from the fountain of revelation. The exercise is as delightful as it is profitable. God's testimonies are to the believer better than thousands, and great sums of gold and silver. They are more pleasant and refreshing than honey distilling from the rock ; and in all his doubts and fears they are his counsellors. The youthful poet Collins, when in declining health and near the close of his earthly pilgrimage, was found sitting by a flowing brook with his Bible, which he clasped to his bosom and exclaimed, "O this blessed book ; but for it I would be miserable, but now I am happy." And an eminent minister of Christ, when anticipating his end, spoke of his Bible as "*the best of all earthly companions.*"

Thirdly. *The reading and study of God's Word by the young should be prayerful.* The Spirit alone, who inspired Holy Scripture, can communicate the saving knowledge of Divine truth to the mind, and can, through the Word, sanctify the heart. From the Father of lights descends every good and perfect gift ; and He has ordained prayer as the means of conferring it. Besides, the truths of the Word become either the means of spiritual benefit to all who read them, or are for their condemnation. They are the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death, to as many as receive them. We cannot possibly profit if we do not "mix faith" with the reading or hearing of the Word ; and this faith is produced solely by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart. The discoveries of the Word are sublime and wonderful ; but they do not enlighten the mind, and make wise unto salvation, except God, who caused the light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."² The Gospel remains "hid" to the unbelieving, as to "them that are lost," except "the Interpreter, one among a thousand," opens the understanding, and at the same time unlocks the Scriptures. The promises which are "exceeding great and precious" cannot make us "partakers of the Divine nature," nor become to

¹ Acts xvii. 11.

² 2 Cor. iv. 6.

us a rich inheritance, till the Spirit apply them, and by them seal us to the day of redemption.

Prayer for Divine teaching should always accompany the reading and study of God's Word. The most laborious and valuable of modern expositors, speaking of his advancement in the knowledge of the Scriptures, says, "A spirit of continual prayer, mixed with reading, has been my principal help in all these things."¹ The recommendation of Quesnel to a minister is equally applicable to the youthful professor, "He must learn Divine things otherwise than by study. The unction of the Spirit is a great master in this science, and it is by prayer that we become his scholars. Much prayer and little study advance the work of God, more than abundance of study without prayer."² Let the young remember and practise this maxim. Let them join much fervent prayer with the reading of the Word, as they desire to advance the work of God in their souls. When they open the Bible, they should look upward for Divine teaching; they should breathe forth fervent ejaculations as they listen to the announcements of God speaking in his Word; and when they conclude the exercise, they should implore Divine influence to seal instructions upon the heart, to dispose and enable them to obey the Word, and to render them wise unto salvation. The course followed by a simple-minded Indian convert should be theirs: "*I open,*" said he, "*my Bible, and God speaks to me; I close my Bible, and I speak to God.*" The direction given by the excellent Willet, a laborious and successful student of the Word, is to the same import: "Sometimes speak to God, and sometimes let God speak to thee;" and he professed to his friends how much he himself had thereby improved his talent.³ Go, then, frequently with an open Bible to the throne of grace. Read and study the Scriptures on your knees. So you will receive Divine illumination and comfort. "Through patience and comfort of the Scriptures" you will have hope. In the conduct of life, you will hear a voice behind you speaking as from the Oracle, "This is the way, walk ye in it;" and you will experience the fulfilment of that most comfortable and comprehensive assurance given to the sons of Zion, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."⁴

Lastly. The Word should be read and studied in the way of *immediate and particular practical application*. "If any man,"

¹ *Scott's Life*, p. 330.

² *Quesnel on John* vii. 17.

³ *Life of Dr Andrew Willet*.

⁴ *Isaiah* liv. 13.

says the Saviour, "will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."¹ We must begin with practice, if we would profit by our researches into the Word; we must hear, so as to do; we must learn, in order to practise. It has been justly observed, that any truth of the Word read or heard, which does not influence the heart and the life, is in reality disbelieved. The great Teacher lays the utmost stress upon this view of the subject. The truths which He reveals are all designed to be practical, to improve the heart, and to constrain the obedience of the life. Mere reading or hearing, without a corresponding practice, cannot profit, and will only evidence that the Word has produced no saving effect; and that he to whom it was addressed is yet an alien from God, and averse in heart to holy obedience.

The Scriptures reveal *principles of action*; and they are never studied aright, if we do not take them as a rule for the daily walk, a standard to regulate our spirit and conduct, and a mould to which the whole frame and habit of the inner and outer man are to be conformed.² The Saviour, well knowing how prone we are to refuse to bow to the authority of the Word, or to pay a seeming respect to it, while we disregard it in practice, speaks with remarkable plainness on this topic, and gives repeated and solemn warning. "*What do ye more than others?*" is the searching question which He addresses to those who profess his name, and enjoy the revelation of his will. "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not those things which I say?"³ "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."⁴ One of the most striking and impressive of our Lord's parables—that of the two builders—was spoken to illustrate the danger of hearing the Word without doing it, and to show the benefit of associating a right practice with the study of the Scriptures. The "foolish man, who built his house upon the sand," and who, when trials came, lost the fruit of all his labour, and miserably perished, is he who "hears Christ's sayings, and does them not." He, on the other hand, is truly wise who builds his house on a rock, where it stands secure against the winds and waves of trouble from every quarter; and this is the man "who hears Christ's sayings, and does them."⁵ One

¹ John vii. 17.

² "The eye of the Bible," says Mr Milner, "like that of a portrait, is uniformly fixed upon us, turn we where we will."

³ Luke vi. 46.

⁴ Luke xii. 47.

⁵ Matt. vii. 24-27.

of the most beautiful incidents of our Lord's ministry gave a tender and affecting confirmation to the same doctrine. While He was preaching the kingdom, and it was intimated that his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak with Him, "He stretched forth his hands toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."¹ He thus declared that true discipleship is inseparably connected with believing and obeying, as well as hearing his Word; that true disciples are dearer to Him than any earthly relations; that He loves, cherishes, provides for, and has intercourse with them, as He does towards the most endeared relatives.

The grand distinction in characters is made on the same ground by the apostles of the Lamb. The statement of the apostle James is so explicit and comprehensive, that no other need be adduced—"Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if a man be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."² Here, hearing without doing is declared to be self-deception. It produces transient impressions, and the person remains without any permanent benefit, or becomes hardened to his condemnation. On the contrary, he who diligently considers the Word as a law to be obeyed, and a rule to walk by—"the perfect law of liberty"—is preserved from forgetfulness, and will be blessed in his deed. Walking in the way of obedience, as directed by the Word, the works of his hands are acknowledged and blessed; and in keeping God's commandments he has a "great reward."³

2. MOTIVES AND ENCOURAGEMENTS.

The daily reading of the Scriptures in an attentive, prayerful, and practical manner, is recommended to the young, by

¹ Matt. xii. 46-50.

² James i. 22-25.

³ "That book," said King Edward VI., "the Bible, in all right, ought to govern us who use the sword for the people's safety. He who rules without the Bible is not to be called God's minister. Under that we ought to live, to fight, to govern the people, and to perform all our affairs. From that alone we obtain all power, virtue, grace, salvation, and whatsoever we have of Divine strength."

the most powerful *motives*, and under the highest *encouragements*.

God himself has enjoined it. He has directed us to "search the Scriptures," as we would value the testimony of Christ, and would inherit eternal life. He commands us to make a constant appeal to the "law and the testimony;" and declares, that "if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them."¹ Parents are required to have God's Word in their hearts, and are enjoined to speak them to their children "when they sit in the house, and walk by the way, when they lie down, and rise up."² And the "testimony and the law," which are placed in Israel, are given to be transmitted; and a solemn charge is laid upon the fathers "to make them known to their children," that "the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born."³ These are the dictates of the highest authority—of permanent and universal obligation. The duty enjoined upon parents implies correlative obedience on the part of children. What the former teaches, the latter are to learn. The young are to receive the instructions of wisdom, that they, in their turn, may communicate them to the following generation.

Their own safety and comfort in religion require such a course. The Scriptures are a safe and unerring guide, and the means of all spiritual comfort. Other guides may fail or deceive, but this never can. As He speaks in his Word, God causes his people to hear a voice behind them saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it;" and hearing and obeying, they cannot stumble or err. The important inquiry for youth, in the opening of the cxix. Psalm, finds its answer here, "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy Word." Walking by the light of the Word, we attain to purity, protection, and peace. In this course, every young person will be able to say from his own experience, "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer;"⁴ and solid and lasting comfort are to be enjoyed in the same way. "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches." "Thy testimonies also are my delights, and my counsellors." "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."⁵ These declarations of the Psalmist accord with the personal experience of all who have made the Bible their daily companion; of all who have come to its prayerful study. The exercise is pleasant

¹ Isa. viii. 20.

² Ps. lxxviii. 5, 6.

³ Ps. cxix. 14, 24, 72.

⁴ Deut. vi. 7.

⁵ Ps. xvii. 4.

and delightful in itself, and is calculated to minister peace and heartfelt satisfaction. In the study of Sacred Scripture, we converse with God, and have intercourse with the excellent of the earth. The intellect is expanded by the contemplation of the loftiest and noblest objects, and the heart is purified. We breathe a holy atmosphere, sources of uneasiness and dissatisfaction are removed, and we delight ourselves in an abundance of peace.

Again. *The gracious operations of the Spirit are exclusively conducted through the instrumentality of the Word.* The Spirit's work is essential to our enjoyment of every part of the great salvation. He convinces, converts, sanctifies, comforts, and perfects. It is his office savingly to teach, to enlighten, and to lead into all truth. He takes the things of Jesus, and shows them to the mind, and is the Spirit of grace and supplication. In these most important and most needful operations, the Spirit never works without the Word. He gives no new revelations. He never travels out of the path of the Divine record. His office is to teach and lead, by bringing to remembrance whatever Jesus has spoken in his Word. The bright light with which He illumines the mind arises from his opening and applying the Scriptures. The joys that He pours into the heart are the consolations of the Word; the petitions which He dictates, when He makes intercession within, are the pleading of the promises which He has inspired; and if He sanctifies and transforms, it is by the same instrumentality, and in the fulfilment of the Saviour's prayer, "*Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth.*" The knowledge of the Scriptures being thus indispensable to the Spirit's gracious operations, how can we hope to enjoy "the fruits of the Spirit?" How can we walk in the Spirit, if we do not frequently converse with the Bible—if we read not therein by day, and meditate by night?

All eminent saints and servants of God have, moreover, been distinguished by their delight in God's Word, and by their extensive acquaintance with it. They were "mighty in the Scriptures." This was the element which they breathed, the armoury whence they drew all their weapons for conflict, the food that nourished and strengthened them, the fountain out of which they drew forth with joy the waters of salvation. "The Word was found, and they did eat it, and it was the joy and rejoicing of their heart."¹ It was their light and comfort in affliction, the sword of the Spirit in their hand, the matter of their prayers, the

¹ Jeremiah xv. 16.

theme of their praises, and their staff and stay as they passed through "the valley of the shadow of death." Would you follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises? Make the Bible your constant companion. Study its blessed truths. Search it as for hid treasure. Receive its testimony concerning Christ, and learn to draw from it direction, strength, and everlasting consolation. So will you, too, experience its strong support in trial; when walking in darkness, the light of the Word will shine upon your path, and you will be enabled to add your testimony to the many that have been already given to the Divine faithfulness—that "not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord hath spoken concerning you."¹

And thus, in fine, may be *realized the blessed assurance of hope*. "The things which were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."² Of all solid expectation of future good, the believer can say, "in his Word do I hope."³ The Divine promise is an "anchor ground" sure and steadfast. It entereth within the veil, "whither the forerunner is for us entered." It is "settled fast in the heavens," and will last for ever. The hopes that are based on any other foundation are illusory, and they make ashamed those who confide in them. Those which are taken from the Word, applied by the Spirit, are sure and stable, as the pillars of the eternal throne. They may always be safely taken as the matter of earnest prayer, and joyful confidence. They are fitted to relieve fears and to cheer the heart. They irradiate the dark future, yield strong consolation in trouble and sorrow, and bring triumph in death. The Christian's hopes are no pleasing fancy or vain imagination. They arise from God's undoubted and unfailing veracity; and like the bow of promise, they shine above dark clouds, and assure us of future blessings. Would you feel the weight of these obligations, and possess such eminent advantages? Then you must frequently read the Scriptures—you must prayerfully and diligently study them. You must aim to grow daily in an increasing acquaintance with the Word, and to conform your spirit and conduct to this perfect law of liberty. Your guidance, safety, and comfort in life; your advancement in true knowledge, and your usefulness in the world; your hope of future felicity, your preparation for it, and your victory over death—all are so intimately and inseparably connected with a thorough experimental acquaintance with the Scriptures, that motives the most powerful urge the

¹ Joshua xxiii. 14.² Romans xv. 4.³ Psalm cxxx. 4.

young to make them their constant companion. With a voice from the excellent glory God is continually addressing you, "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, HEAR HIM." Hear Christ, the great Prophet, speaking in His Word. Believe, love, obey his voice; and to you the wonders of the transfiguration scene will be betimes renewed; and in the performance of this great duty you will enjoy privileges, exalted and satisfactory as they are excellent and lasting.

The directions of the excellent Matthew Henry to young ministers may be suitably given to the youth of the Church in general,—“Study close; especially make the Bible your study. There is no knowledge which I am more desirous to increase in than that. Men get wisdom by books, but wisdom toward God is to be gotten out of God’s Book, and that by *digging*. Most men do but walk over the surface of it, and pick up here and there a flower. Few dig into it. Read over other books, to help you to understand that Book. Fetch your prayers and sermons from thence. The Volume of Inspiration is a full fountain ever overflowing, and hath always something new.”¹

We close these counsels respecting the daily, prayerful study of the Scriptures, with the beautiful observations of the learned and judicious Witsius:—

“The attentive study of the Scriptures has a sort of constraining power. It fills the mind with the most splendid form of heavenly truth, while it teaches with purity, solidity, certainty, and without the least mixture of error. It soothes the mind with an inexpressible sweetness; it satisfies the sacred hunger and thirst for knowledge, with flowing rivers of honey and butter; it penetrates into the innermost heart with irresistible influence; it imprints its own testimony so firmly on the mind, that the believing soul rests upon it with the same security as if it had been carried up into the third heavens, and heard it from God’s own mouth; it touches all the affections, and breathes the sweetest fragrance of holiness upon the pious reader, even though he may not perhaps comprehend the full extent of his reading. We can scarcely say how strongly we are opposed to that preposterous method of study—which, alas! too much prevails among many—of forming our views of Divine things from human writings, and afterwards supporting them by Scripture authority—the result either of our own inquiry, or adduced by others too rashly, and without further

¹ *Henry’s Life*, Williams’s edition, p. 222.

examination, or bearing upon the subject—when we ought to draw our own views of Divine truths immediately from the Scriptures themselves, and to make no other use of human writings than as indices, marking those places in the chief points in theology from which we may be instructed in the mind of the Lord".¹, ²

SECT. IV.—*Redeeming Time.*

Much has been said and written of the value of time, and of the importance of improving it aright ; and yet after all, there is perhaps no subject in which the young more require to be instructed and impressed. The period of the continuance on earth of each individual is determined ; it is but brief, and on the season of youth, as a preparation for the future, great interests depend. The habit of making the most of present opportunities, and of performing present duty with all diligence, is important to all—to the youthful professor it is invaluable. Thus alone can he fulfil the sacred obligation into which he has entered, and thus only will he be qualified for the proper discharge of the solemn duties implied in the Christian profession. Time is to be regarded as among the chief of those talents which the Lord has intrusted to us, with the charge, "Occupy till I come." It is given to be laid out, so as to yield a profitable return ; and the loss or improvement of it must to a certainty be accounted for to the Lord at his coming. The Scripture direction is "redeeming the time"³—meaning, to "endeavour to recover or bring back the time that has been lost, by diligently using what remains, and improving it to the most valuable purposes."

¹ *Witsius' Miscell. Sacr.*, vol. ii.

² Lady Jane Grey, the night before she was beheaded, sent a Bible to her sister Catherine, with this encomium written on a blank leaf at the end of it : "I have here sent you, good sister, a Book, which, although it be not outwardly trimmed with gold, yet, inwardly, it is of more worth than precious stones. It is the Book, dear sister, of the law of the Lord. It is his testament and last will, which He bequeathed unto us wretches, which shall lead you to the path of eternal joy ; and if you, with a good mind, read it, it shall bring you to an immortal life. It shall teach you how to live and how to die. It shall win you more than you should have gained by your father's lands ; for, as if God had prospered him, you should have inhabited his lands ; so, if you apply diligently to this Book, seeking to direct your life after it, you shall be an inheritor of such riches as neither the covetous shall withdraw from you, neither thief shall steal, nor yet the moths corrupt."

³ Ephesians v. 16.

The connection in which this Divine counsel is introduced is observable and striking. It follows a solemn call to repentance, and a promise of spiritual revival. It is opposed to a careless, inconsiderate course of conduct, which is represented as folly ; and it is enjoined as the means of escape from danger, and of security from abounding evils. By redeeming time, we give evidence that we are awakened from the dead, and that Christ has given us life ; we walk not as fools ; and in evil days, when exposed to temptation or trial, we enjoy safety and comfort.

It is of vast moment to the young to be made thoroughly alive to the value of time, and to be brought early to redeem it. Without such a sense and habit, they are in danger of mispending and frittering away the season of improvement—of floating loose on society, of spending a life devoid of all profit to themselves or others, and having to lament at length, in unavailing regrets, their thoughtlessness and folly. The due improvement of time, on the other hand, will in itself minister real satisfaction, and its fruits will be salutary and permanent. We may learn to live much in a little time ; and by turning to profitable account our days as they pass, we may ourselves grow up to the stature of perfect men in Christ, and may be honoured instruments of advancing the Divine glory, and of benefiting others.

There are many considerations which should urge the youthful professor, when entering upon a course of Christian activity, to commence with cherishing a deep and constant sense of the value of time, and to go forward with the fixed purpose always to redeem it. It is one of the most precious gifts which God confers. He bestows it in a manner different from that in which He dispenses his other benefits ; for these are given largely, but this is dealt out by moments, without any assurance of one to succeed another. It is accounted to us as the period to seek salvation, and to prepare for eternity. Our time here is the day of our merciful visitation—the day of work, the space granted us to repent, and to attend to the things that belong to our peace. If the soul's salvation is not secured now, it is lost for ever ; and surely this is too momentous a concern to be trifled with. The whole period on earth is not too large to devote to a matter of such transcendent importance ; and the least portion of it is too much to be abstracted from the all-engrossing concern of eternity.

Time past never returns, and misspent time leaves behind grounds of bitter and lasting regret, even when the individual has obtained mercy ; and in many instances it conducts to the fearful doom of "the wicked and slothful servant," who hid

his Lord's money in the earth, instead of improving it. When we consider, moreover, how much of our time is necessarily taken up in preparing for the business of life, in sleep and food, how much is taken away by others, how much is already gone, we should feel the unspeakable importance of redeeming what remains. It may be added, that the most eminent persons who have been in the world have acknowledged the value of improving time, and have been careful to practise it. Our highest and brightest example here is the perfect model of Him who came down from heaven on a mission of boundless love and mercy to our world. He "went about doing good." He never trifled or misspent time. It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will, and to finish his work. Declaring his devotedness, He said, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."¹ His whole life on earth was the illustration of this determination. When preaching to multitudes, and working miracles of mercy, during the day, He spent whole nights in prayer, or "rose up a great while before day," and retired to pray. In this practical estimate of the value of time, and of the importance of constantly improving it, our blessed Lord has left us "an example that we should follow his steps." All who have imbibed the mind of Christ, and who have walked as He walked, have in practice shown the unspeakable value which they attached to time, and have endeavoured to fill up the period allotted to them, with employments tending to advance the Divine glory, and to benefit mankind. From the period of the Apostle Paul's conversion, how diligent, how unwearied was he in his Master's work! With what true devotedness did he declare his fixed attachment to his service, and his heroic fortitude, when he said, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus."² Many other instances of redeeming time occur in the history of eminent servants of God. Luther, when engaged in the most active employments, and in incessant travels and labours, to the astonishment of Europe, produced a translation of the whole Bible, of such a character as to have no equal before its publication, and few superior to it since. A single word explains all. Luther followed a rigid system of doing something at his translation every day. "*Nulla dies*," says he, "*sine versu*;" and this

¹ John ix. 4.

² Acts xx. 24.

brought him soon to the conclusion of the whole work. It was by the same regard to the value of time, and by the same steadfast method of redeeming it, that Calvin, when labouring under bodily infirmities, and surrounded with hosts of enemies and distracting anxieties, prepared and published so many imperishable works. Of Melancthon it is recorded, that if interrupted in his studies, he would redeem from sleep or from recreation the time he had lost. The excellent missionary, Henry Martyn, had the character at college of "*The man that never wasted an hour.*" Such instances should serve at once as a precept and encouragement to similar diligence and devotedness. If you would number among "the excellent of the earth," and would be honoured of God in your generation, you must, above all, avoid dissipating this precious talent, or hiding it unimproved; you must habitually aim at laying out the time for some valuable purpose.

I. PURPOSES FOR WHICH TIME SHOULD BE REDEEMED.

As furnishing the young with some plain and useful hints upon this important subject, we shall notice a few of the *purposes* for which they should redeem time, and afterwards the *manner* in which they may practically observe the apostle's direction.

First. Of these purposes may be mentioned, *the great business of your own salvation.* This is your great concern. For this your days on earth are given you. The work of God, the first great work of your life, is to believe on Him whom the Father hath sent. There is space afforded for repentance. Preparation for eternity is our main business in the world; and our present time is given as "capital to trade with for eternity." If time is heedlessly squandered, the great business of life will be neglected, the soul's salvation will not be sought, and the vast concerns of eternity will be overlooked. It is because men "make light" of these things that so much time is wasted to no purpose; and the sad result is, that in many instances salvation is sought "*too late.*" "The master of the house" has arisen and shut to the door, and then those who begin to seek, who idly *wish* instead of *striving* to enter in, shall be excluded. Our important duty and highest interest is to "seek the Lord while He may be found, and to call upon Him while He is near." Did we sufficiently realize the necessity and greatness of the soul's salvation, did we properly reflect upon an eternity of misery to be shunned, or an eternity of bliss to

be enjoyed, we would be impelled to improve every moment of time by labouring with all diligence to "make our calling and election sure." We should redeem time for religious duties, for reading the Scriptures, for prayer and meditation and self-examination, for retirement, and for those duties which concern others.¹

Secondly. We should redeem time *for actively advancing God's glory throughout the earth.* This great work is worthy an immortal being; it is fitted to enlist the highest energies of all minds, even the most gifted. It engaged the counsels of eternity, brought the Son of God from heaven to earth, and led to the surpassing wonders of Gethsemane and Calvary. For this the Mediator ascended to heaven; and for effecting it, the whole moral government of the universe is conducted. Angels rejoice in the glorious design, as they take the deepest interest in its accomplishment; and for this the saints of God have in all ages laboured and prayed. The promotion of God's glory in the world includes the banishment of vice, the diffusion of the Gospel, the instruction of the ignorant, the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth, and the conversion of the world. This world, it has been properly said, "was created by Christ, and for Christ;" and Christians are the ordained instrumentality for accomplishing God's designs of mercy towards the perishing human race, as they are greatly honoured by being called to take a part in this enterprise of mercy and love. Time occupied in promoting God's glory, and in spreading the Saviour's renowned fame, is time, in the best and fullest sense, redeemed. The work ennobles all who engage in it aright. We become co-workers with God in it, and shall eventually share in the ultimate glorious triumph of the cause of truth and righteousness.

Thirdly. *The necessary pursuits of business and our mental improvement* call upon us to redeem time. The Divine injunction requires us to be "*diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*" We should provide "things honest in the sight of all men;" and much of our time must, in general, be occupied in pursuits that pertain to the things of this present life. Wasting time is wholly inconsistent with success in any avocation; and we can neither obey the Divine

¹ Voltaire, the celebrated French infidel, when dying, said to Dr Tronchin, his physician, "I am abandoned by God and man. I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life." The doctor said, "Sir, you cannot live six weeks." Voltaire replied, "Then I shall go to hell, and you will go with me;" and soon after expired.

command concerning our worldly employments, nor hope for success in them, if we are thus characterized. Besides, it is a solemn duty to improve our own minds, according to our own circumstances and opportunities. By redeeming time *for* business, we will again be able to redeem time *from* it for intellectual improvement. We shall thus find the truth of the declaration of heavenly wisdom, "*The hand of the diligent maketh rich.*" We may have to give to him that needeth. And our minds well cultivated, we shall be fitted for more extensive usefulness in our day, and shall have opened up to us new sources of comfort and happiness.

Lastly. Time should be redeemed for *benevolent exertion*. In a world like ours, where sin reigns, there will always be many cases of human misery to be relieved, and many trials and sufferings to be alleviated—the vicious to be reclaimed, the poor to be supplied, neglected youth to be snatched from the paths of destruction and trained to virtue, and the aged and infirm to be cared for and sustained. These are offices to which our holy religion calls its professors; and we can neither exhibit its spirit, nor fulfil the will of its Divine Founder, if we shift such claims, and neglect these duties. We should redeem time from other employments for such services. In them we are honoured to be almoners of the Divine bounty; and what we thus do, if performed in a right spirit, will be accounted as done to our blessed Lord and Master himself. When He shall sit on the throne of judgment, in distributing the reward of grace, He will make special mention of works of mercy—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."¹ How important to redeem time for works which shall hereafter receive this wondrous commendation!

In short, the Christian is called to improve his talents and redeem time for studying and practising whatever may make him stand complete in all the will of Christ—for benefiting to the utmost his fellow-creatures, and for bringing the greatest revenue of honour to Him who has called him out of darkness into his marvellous light.

2. HOW TIME IS TO BE REDEEMED.

A few cursory hints may suffice to show in what manner the youthful professor may practically exemplify this important duty.

¹ Matthew xxv. 40.

1. Avoid, as exceedingly injurious, *habits of wasting time*. These are various and very common. Some consume it in sloth ; others spend it in undue attention to dress and decoration of their persons ; some kill time by indulging excessive fondness for company and amusements ; and some, in trifling conversation, dissipate their days and enfeeble their minds. The lazy loiterers in society are a numerous class ; and the expenditure of a most precious talent, in one or other of these ways, is chargeable against many even who have made a profession of religion. No lengthened argument is required to show how evil in their nature, and pernicious in their consequences, are such habits. The slothful person is pronounced a "wicked servant," and is rejected with utter disapprobation. Attaching great importance to dress, and consuming time in it, is not only prohibited in Scripture, but it almost always betrays a want of concern for mental improvement, and for the cultivation of the heart. Love of amusements, and of worldly company, or of parties of pleasure, besides losing much valuable time to ourselves, spreads snares for others. We encourage them in the like dissipation, and do all that we can to render them prodigal of one of Heaven's best gifts, and forgetful of their solemn accountability. And much talking will generally be found "idle words ;" wanting not much vanity, and devoid of all profit to ourselves and others. Beware of all approach to such habits, if you would redeem the time. If once contracted, they will insensibly steal away your time, till hardly aught remains to prosecute the great ends of existence. They will unfit you for turning to good account what is left ; they will effectually prevent the accomplishment of good resolutions ; and they will render you guilty partakers in the slothfulness and dissipation of others.

2. Learn to improve *the brief intervals of time*. The most active person has many portions of time that intervene between one employment and another, and that may be taken from seasons of retirement or leisure. A profitable employment of these forms at once a salutary habit, and yields valuable fruits. Indeed, upon the neglect or improvement of these intervals depends, in a great measure, the character we form for usefulness and activity, or the contrary. It is related of a distinguished French authoress, Madame de Genlis, that her duty requiring her to be at table just *fifteen minutes* before her royal mistress came to dinner, she improved this brief space by reading and study ; and to this the public owes one or two of

her lively volumes. The devoted and eminent student Halley, in his last session at the university, resolved to spend the few minutes, at morning and night, in which his tea was a-drawing, in committing to memory the Sacred Scriptures ; and to this may be ascribed, in a considerable measure, his great readiness and accuracy in bringing forward scriptural testimony. You will derive no little advantage from imitating such examples. Half hours and minutes redeemed will, in a short period, accumulate into a large stock ; and what others squander unheeded, you may make to yield a profitable and lasting return.

3. *Beware continually of procrastination.* It has been quaintly but properly said, "God's time is always to-day ; Satan's time is always to-morrow." God enjoins present duty, and gives to none assurance of opportunities to come. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "Now is the acceptable time." The habit of delaying, and putting off till to-morrow, what may and should be done to-day, is most pernicious. The young should be most careful to avoid it. Let them actively betake themselves to the work which present duty requires, and they will thus escape the future bitter reflection of resolutions having been formed and not executed ; the work of each day will be done in its place, and the approval of the good and faithful servant will be the fruit and blessed reward.

4. *Fill up your time with useful employments, and observe order and punctuality in attending them.* Every day, every hour is given us by God, that something may be done in it conducive to his glory, and to our own benefit. There is work enough for every hour ; there is important business for every moment. The habit of President Edwards was to mark out beforehand the particular works to which, at specified times, he would direct attention, and punctually to observe them. When riding or walking, he always took with him materials for writing, that he might note down observations or reflections as they might arise. It is of great benefit thus to lay out a plan, and to endeavour rigidly to adhere to it. Order is essential to sure and comfortable progress in any pursuit ; and punctuality, while it inspires confidence, enables us to effect what to others may appear wonderful. "A time for everything, and everything in its time," "a place for everything, and everything in its place," are valuable maxims for all, and to the young they are especially useful. The following simple illustration has been given of the advantage of

following out a fixed plan :—" One morning a man was digging a path through a deep snow-bank. It was almost insupportably cold, and he seemed to make but little head-way, though he worked as if for a wager. At length, getting out of breath, he paused, and marked out the width of the path with his shovel ; then marked out the width of each shovelful, and consequently the amount of snow at each throw of the shovel. In fifteen minutes he had done more, and it was done neater and easier, than in thirty minutes previous, when working without a plan." ' Nothing should be done in " a hurry ;" all our duties should be performed with composed and fixed attention ; and in general, one thing should be thoroughly finished before we engage in another. The reply of Sir Isaac Newton to one who expressed astonishment at his efforts and success, and who inquired how he accomplished so much, was characteristic, " I do but one thing at a time, and try to *finish* it, once for all."

5. *Early rising* is a habit indispensable to a proper redeeming of the time.

The counsels and experience of the wisest and best concur with examples recorded in the Scriptures to recommend strongly this habit to the young. It conduces to health, invigorates the mind, facilitates success in the pursuits of life, contributes to spiritual advancement and comfort, and ever tends to length of life. The shrewd remark of Franklin is, " That he who rises late, may trot all day, and not have overtaken his business ;" and Swift gives it as the result of his own experience, " That he never knew a man that came to greatness or eminence who lay in bed of a morning." The excellent Dr Doddridge, speaking of his *Family Expositor*, gives the following striking testimony on this subject :—" I will here record the observation which I have found of great use to myself, and to which I may say that the production of this work, and of most of my other writings, is owing, viz., that the difference between rising at five and seven o'clock in the morning for the space of forty years, supposing a man to go to bed at the same hour at night, is nearly equivalent to the addition of *ten years* to a man's life." What an impressive argument this in behalf of early rising ! How few are there, when their days on earth are numbered, who would not desire to have ten years added to their life ! Young persons ! you have the means in your power now, and you will as really make the acquisition, as if your days on earth were protracted, as were Hezekiah's,

• Todd's *Students' Manual*, p. 39.

a number of years, with this important advantage besides, that they will be years of vigour and activity and improvement.¹ The instances of distinguished saints recorded in Scripture, and of eminent advantages which they enjoyed in connection with early rising, furnish a strong motive for adopting this practice. The sweet singer of Israel speaks of preventing the dawning of the morning, that he might meditate on God's precepts.² The first gracious tidings of the Saviour's victory over the grave were announced to female disciples, who came "early, while it was yet dark, to the sepulchre;" and the first interview with the risen Lord was made to one who remained a sorrowful and early visitant. Of our blessed Redeemer himself, it is recorded that "He rose a great while before day," and retired "to a mountain to pray." Would we imitate Christ, and follow the example of "the excellent ones of the earth;" would we reap benefits from the mind and body, for this world and the world to come, let us cultivate the habit of early rising.

6. Remember continually that you must give *an account of the improvement of all your time to God*. "After a long time, the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them." That account you cannot evade, and you may rest assured it will be most full and particular. Your Lord's money—and your time is a principal part of it—you should be prepared to render back, with a due account of the improvement. Cherish the impression upon your spirits of the certainty and momentous nature of this account. Set it before you, in carving out work for your day, and in entering on any business; and reflect on it solemnly when you are taking yourselves to task for the engagements of every day. So will you be preserved from many evils into which others are precipitated; you will be prepared to give in your account at last with joy; and instead of being found a *time-waster*, you will live to some valuable purpose, and the joys of eternity will compensate abundantly for time well spent, and for opportunities and privileges improved.

SECT. V.—*Formation of Character.*

From those who have made a profession of religion, and have become members of the Church, there are naturally

¹ See Todd's *Students' Manual*.

² Psalm cxix. 147.

expected a character and deportment superior to others. The expectation is reasonable, and youthful professors should endeavour to satisfy it. It has been justly observed, that though men of the world dislike religion, they are keen-sighted enough to observe inconsistencies in religious professors; and not only do they mark them, but from them they frequently take occasion to direct their most virulent attacks against religion itself. The Author of our holy religion frequently inculcates upon his followers the value and necessity of approved character. He requires them to be "harmless, and without rebuke" in an evil world, to shine as lights therein, to do good to all as they have opportunity, and by their example, not less than by their doctrine, to be as "the salt of the earth"—the preserving and purifying element of human society.

In one of the beautiful and expressive apothegms of the Book of Proverbs, the royal preacher declares, "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold.*" The value of this maxim to persons in any station in society can hardly be estimated; to the young entering upon their Christian course, its importance is incalculable. "A good name" may be taken here to mean, "a character of tried worth;" and this is intimately connected with the advancement of God's glory, and the honour of the Church. Among men it commands attention and respect, conciliates favour, and possesses a moral influence which adventitious circumstances of rank, or riches, or power, or even of talent and learning, never can confer.

The slightest observation of society will serve to show the manifold advantages of possessing an approved and established character. It forms a defence against suspicion and evil reports. A person of bad or doubtful character is suspected of crimes of which he is not guilty, and even his good actions are ascribed to bad motives, and he can never command the confidence of fellow-men. A man of tried reputation, on the other hand, is raised above suspicion. Should he at times be exposed to the reproach of the unworthy, within himself he has an antidote for the poison; and when he has passed through the temporary ordeal, he will come forth with renovated strength and brightened beauty. A good character, again, brings with it the testimony of a good conscience, and commands the approval and esteem of those whose opinion and regard are really valuable. The pleasures of an approving mind, which accom-

pany it, are preferable to all the treasures of earth. The unsuspecting confidence, and cordial approbation of the wise and the good, are a part of its reward here ; and all, whether good or bad, are constrained to render to such a character the tribute of respect. A good name thus becomes the means of increasing one's capacity, and of extending his sphere of usefulness. Character is thus power—character is influence ; and even though poor in the world, and devoid of all other means by which to influence his fellows in society, the person of known worth has the power of becoming eminently useful ; and the circle in which he moves, and the Church and society at large, will derive from him manifold and permanent advantages. A fair character frequently leads the way to advancement and success in the world.

“Reputation,” it has been justly remarked, “is better than the richest capital. It makes friends, it creates funds, it draws around its possessor patronage and support, and it not unfrequently opens for him a sure and easy way to wealth, and honour, and happiness.” Intimately connected also with the interest and happiness of those to whom we are nearly related in life, is the character which we form. Parents, friends, all who regard us with any interest of affection, have their happiness, more or less, bound up with the character for which we are distinguished. Our reputation for uprightness and usefulness will reflect on them honour, and give them satisfaction and delight ; while our want of a good name will cover them with shame, or fill with poignant sorrow and grief relatives and friends, who naturally expected to derive from us sources of satisfaction and happiness.

The influence of character even extends to future generations, and looks forward to the eternal destiny. It is a maxim of most extensive application, and of vast importance, that “*none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*”¹ The character which a person possesses will influence others for good or evil ; it may be impressed on the next generation, and that on the next ; and thus the character, and consequently the happiness or misery, of multitudes in coming ages, may, in a great measure, be dependent on the spirit which we cherish or display, the conduct we pursue, and the principles which we profess and disseminate. And never can it be too frequently and deeply considered, that the character and dispositions which we now acquire will generally go with us to death, and remain with us throughout eternity. It is the beautiful thought

¹ Romans xiv. 7.

of the lamented Pollok, in his *Course of Time*, that in the great congregation that shall meet around the "white throne" for judgment, nothing will remain but character—

"It was a strange assembly; none of all
That congregation vast, could recollect
Aught like it in the history of man.
No badge of outward state was seen, no mark
Of age, or rank, or national attire,
Or robe professional, or air of trade.

It was a congregation vast of men,
Of unappendaged and unvarnished men
Of plain unceremonious human beings,
Of all but moral character bereaved.
His vice or virtue now to each remained
Alone. All else with their grave-clothes, men had
Put off, as badges worn by mortal, not
Immortal man; alloy that could not pass
The scrutiny of death's refining fires."

Course of Time, b. viii., pp. 227, 229.

The habits, mental and moral, acquired in life, it has been solemnly and suitably said, "are the dying dress of the soul—the vestments in which it must come forth to meet the sentence of an impartial Judge. If filthy, they will be filthy still; if holy, they will be holy still. It should be constantly remembered and solemnly considered, that the character which we are now forming, or which we have put on, is, in all probability, that in which we shall appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, and in which our condition throughout eternity will be decided."¹

As additional to these observations on the importance of character, we remark that a character for good or evil is formed in *early life*. Making due allowances for constitutional diversities of temperament and disposition, for differences of opportunity and education, and for variety in the mode of development, it may be safely affirmed, that, as the most critical period of human life is from *thirteen* or *fourteen* to *twenty-one* years of age, so during this period more is done to mould and settle character than in any similar portion of the future life. If the age of boyhood and advancing youth is trifled away; if, during it, religion is neglected, and improper habits acquired, mature age will be unprofitable, and, in a great majority of cases, the character will be such as to command no respect, and to be productive of no useful fruits. If, in this spring-time of life, the

¹ See Haweis's *Lectures on Formation of Character*.

mind and heart are uncultivated ; if opportunities of improvement are neglected, and habits of slothfulness are formed—not to speak of indulgence in vicious courses—a loss will be sustained which no future exertions will fully retrieve ; and the character will receive an impression which future regrets will not avail to efface. Youthful professors ! You cannot feel this too deeply ! You may be tempted, as thousands like you are, to put away from you considerations so solemn, or, at least, to refuse their entertainment till a future and, as you vainly think, “a more convenient season.” You may seldom or never have thought that the spirit, and conduct, and habits which now distinguish you, have aught to do with your future character in public life, or with your usefulness and success in the station which you may afterwards be called to occupy. But, be assured, this is a great, and, in many cases, a fatal mistake. Life will unquestionably take much of its tone and colouring from “the plastic powers” which are now operating. Almost everything depends upon a proper direction being given to the outset of life.

“Just as the twig is bent, the tree’s inclined.”

The course which you now take is usually decisive. Whatever principles you adopt, whatever habits you form, will become to you a kind of *second nature* ; and whether good or bad, will remain with you fixed and permanent.

So uniform and established is this connection between youthful dispositions and habits, and the character that distinguishes a person throughout life, that it has been said, if the habits, mental and moral, of the boy are known, you may from them predict the character of the man—whether as active or indolent, upright and honourable, or mean and contemptible, useful or unprofitable. Even the intellectual and moral features of childhood not unfrequently appear distinctly visible amidst the cares and activities, the fully-developed affections and dispositions of manhood. It is on this principle that, in perusing the biography of distinguished individuals, we feel an irresistible propensity to learn the habits and pursuits of their early years ; and we all know with what interest we mark the *germ* of a feature of character in infancy and boyhood, which becomes full-blown in mature years, and which brings forth plentiful fruits of wisdom, and virtue, and holiness.

I. ELEMENTS OF AN APPROVED CHARACTER.

What, it may now be inquired, is the character for which youthful professors should study to be distinguished? What is the character which may be regarded as inseparably connected with future usefulness and success? For the present, we content ourselves with sketching a brief outline, and exhibiting a few of its more prominent features; and we shall then offer a few hints concerning the proper method of forming such a character.

It is a plain but important observation, that if a person would draw an elegant portrait, he must copy after a faultless model, and he must begin by forming in his own mind a distinct image of what he wishes to delineate. Just so, if you would be distinguished by a character which gives promise of future usefulness and perfection, you must have a clear idea of such a character; a just conception of the essential elements of the "good name," which is "rather to be chosen than great riches." Here it is of unspeakable moment to think correctly, and to form a fixed and accurate judgment. "No man," it has been justly remarked, "can well be expected to rise higher than his own standard of excellence. If this be low and faulty, such will be the character that is modelled after it. If it be noble and pure and elevated, such will be the character that is formed under its influence."¹

First of all. Those who would possess an approved character must aim to have more than a *negative reputation*. They must not be content merely to pass without blame or censure. It is a grievous delusion for persons to imagine that they are all that is right, or that their prospects for the future are safe and good, because they are free from some gross defects, or common errors and vices. You may succeed in deceiving fellow-men sometimes in this way, but you are only practising a more fatal deception upon yourselves, and you cannot deceive God. The mask will in a little fall off. Nothing will do in profession or character but a principle of positive holiness. The lamp without oil in the vessel will go out, and leave its possessor in midnight darkness. The house that is only "swept and garnished," without being "furnished," will be again entered by the evil spirit, bringing with him seven other spirits, and "the last state of that man is worse than the first." You must

¹ Haweis's *Lectures*, &c.

never, then, rest satisfied with being free from matters of blame—from what is mean or morally wrong. Instead of aiming not to be blameworthy, you must study and practise what is praiseworthy. You must “*shine as lights in the world*,” and not think it enough to be inoffensive and without a cloud upon your reputation. Not even popular applause should content you. This you may possess, and yet be destitute of any right principle, and your character be utterly worthless. Nothing short of what is solid and substantial, nothing short of what is really good and excellent, should content you. You must “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things,” and aim ever to maintain “a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.”

Again. The youthful professor should seek early to be distinguished by *those qualities which, in the common judgment of society, are regarded as constituting a good character*. Indifferent as mankind are to religion, they expect much from those who make a strict religious profession. Those who have voluntarily arranged themselves on Christ's side should, therefore, be known in society as rising above the common level, and as distinguished for whatever is virtuous, and praiseworthy, and honourable. They should not regard it sufficient to have a knowledge of religion, or to be reputed attentive to religious duties, though this should not be wanting. They should show that their character is formed after a higher model than the mere men of the world ever propose to themselves; and that they are required to exhibit qualities and habits superior to those which are the offspring of mere natural principles. In such a character there should be *integrity*, or unbending regard to rectitude; *decision* and *independence*, or a fixed determination to be governed by an enlightened conviction of truth; and the *absence of all selfish aims and motives*. There should be kindness and compassion to fellow-men, or disinterested benevolence; and a public spirit, discovered in willingly denying one's self, and readily making sacrifices for the good of others, and for the promotion of the cause of truth. These are some of the leading features of a good character; the living, breathing lineaments of that good name, which is better than riches, and more fragrant than precious ointment. Labour, my young friends, to possess such a character early; and let it be developed more and more as you advance in life. You will thus prepare the way for your own future usefulness. Thus may you be instruments of unspeakable good to others;

and you may bring a revenue of glory to Him whose servants you have professed to be, whose favour is better than life, and in whose presence there is fulness of joys for evermore.

The character which the youth of the Church should seek early to form should, moreover, be *spiritual*; it should be one of sterling and unostentatious piety. God honours his own gracious work in the hearts and lives of his servants; and those who have been owned by Him to do any great work for the advancement of his glory, have been men of strong faith, fervent prayer, single-minded, and consistent holiness of heart and life. Destitute of genuine piety, attainments in knowledge will be of no avail; and all other advantages will fail to render persons approved and faithful servants of God, or to secure the rewards of holy obedience. The Christian professor should realize the character of a *man of God*. He should possess *spiritual* attainments, and "covet earnestly the best gifts." His acquaintance with Divine things should be progressive, and he should be ever ready to impart to others the benefit of his acquirements. He should regard himself as laid under the strongest obligations to "do good to all men as he has opportunity;" and everywhere, and at all times, to diffuse abroad the savour of the knowledge of Christ. A character adorned with spiritual attainments, and replenished by spiritual gifts, will command esteem and respect. It will reflect credit upon the professor of religion, and is, indeed, that which constitutes "the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."¹

Unaffected, devoted benevolence should be regarded as a main element of the character which the youthful professor is to put on, and it is essential to fruitfulness and success. "Good-will to men" is a principal feature of our holy religion; of that religion which brings glory to God in the highest, and which proclaims and establishes peace on earth. Genuine benevolence should breathe in all the dispositions, and pervade all the conduct, of the baptized youth of the Church. A contracted, selfish spirit, however manifested, will never command esteem and affection, and cannot possibly lead to extensive usefulness. The young must learn not to live to themselves, they must seek to know the luxury of doing good. They must cultivate universal philanthropy, and be at pains and expense to benefit others, if they would follow Him who "went about doing good," or have eminent success in his service. It is not merely by talking or bustling about benevolent schemes that we put

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 17.

on or display this feature of character. We must put our hands early to the work. We must learn to regard it as our true interest and honour to do good to the bodies and souls of men. We must prize it as our highest reward to be the instrument of enlightening even one individual who is in moral and spiritual darkness, to lead one child to Jesus, and to pluck a single brand out of the burning. This we must regard as our special errand into the world, and consider that for this we are given all the talents, natural and acquired, that we possess, if we would really reflect around us that lovely feature of the "Gospel—good-will to men"—and attract wanderers to the path of life. Devoted benevolence is at once one of the highest qualities of a useful character, and a signal means of success in valuable undertakings. All who have done much good in the world have possessed it. Begin now, youthful servants of Christ, to cultivate and exemplify it, and you will lay a sure foundation for future usefulness and distinction. Consult, contrive how you may be employed in doing good. Hail every opportunity that may invite you to the work of benevolence; and be assured your own mind and body will be the better for engaging in it. Your other pursuits, instead of being retarded, will be furthered, and you will reap the benefit, as you will enjoy the pure satisfaction, of having co-operated in the purpose and plan of Divine benevolence, and of being acknowledged benefactors of mankind.

2. MANNER OF FORMING A USEFUL CHARACTER.

For the formation of such a character, the young should—

1. Remember that their *own personal exertions are indispensable*. The higher elements of a spiritual character are of Divine communication, but are never possessed, save in the way of faithful and sustained efforts. A proper character is not obtained by inheritance from parents, nor created by external advantages, nor put on by indolence and inactivity. It is the result of strenuous endeavours; it flows from holy diligence, and is the fruit and reward of good principles, displayed in a course of virtuous, praiseworthy, and benevolent conduct.

2. *Habitual self-denial* is essential to the formation of a useful and approved character. All who have been honoured servants of God, in any age, have displayed a high measure of self-denial. They have imbibed, and reduced to practice, this first lesson of discipleship. Gideon's *Three Hundred*, who were honoured

with the victory over the enemies of Israel, were hardy, self-mortified men, disregarding their own ease, and borne on by an irrepressible desire to avenge the insulted and oppressed cause of Israel's God. The Old Testament prophets, and the ministers of the ancient sanctuary, were required to be denied to ease, honour, and worldly interest. Our Lord's directions, when He commissioned his disciples to set up his kingdom in the earth, implied a high measure of self-denial, and of non-conformity to the world. The martyrs of Christ "loved not their lives to the death;" and all who have been renowned as reformers, missionaries, and eminently successful servants of God, have been thus distinguished. Let this be the course adopted by the youthful professor to mould his character. Learn to take up the cross daily, and follow Christ. Go to Him "without the camp," bearing his reproach. Begin early to despise and to trample upon the fading honours, and perishing possessions, and sickening pleasures of the world. You will thus be trained for veteran service in the army of the Captain of salvation, and you will enjoy here and hereafter the rewards of veteran soldiers. Like the army of confessors and martyrs that has gone before, not loving their lives to the death, you will overcome "by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of his testimony;" and a crown of glory, "that fadeth not away," will be your future unspeakable distinction.

3. *Intimate and frequent intercourse with persons of decided piety and real excellence* will contribute to the formation of a distinguished character. Example is powerful to modify and mould character, and to prepare it for usefulness or trial. Every individual has a company, which may be called his own, to which his attachments are drawn, and in which he seeks for rest and satisfaction; and the character of this society determines his character. Let the young, then, choose as their companions the pious, the devoted, and the benevolent. You should imitate good men as they follow Christ, and follow them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. Avoid, as the worst plague, the loiterer, the dissipated, the irreligious, and the selfish. Consult with those who are worthy of your confidence, how you may be useful, and how you may excel in every good word and work. With approved servants of Christ concert mutually, and prosecute plans of usefulness; and above all, employ the power of united fervent prayer. You will thus feel an irresistible impulse to all that is virtuous, and amiable, and excellent. Your future life in this world, and

your eternal state, can alone attest fully how much you will profit by companionship with "all them that fear and obey God."

4. *Proposing to yourselves an elevated standard* is a principal means of forming a distinguished character. The apostle's direction is to "leave first principles," and "go on to perfection;"¹ and, again, to "press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."² Dr Carey's maxim was, "Attempt great things; *expect great things*;" and Robert Raikes, the founder of Sabbath-schools, assumed for his motto, "*Trust and try*."

Justly has it been said, "That he who aims at the sun, to be sure will not reach it, but his arrow will fly much higher than if he aimed at an object level with himself." So let the young fix on a high standard; and though they may not fully reach it, they will certainly rise higher than if they aspired after a model of inferior excellence. You should adopt also as the maxim of your conduct, "*What ought to be done, can be done*;" and you should try. Work patiently and perseveringly, and, in general, you will succeed. The Saviour himself is the blessed and perfect model. His character is a concentration of all conceivable excellencies; and his possession of our humanity was designed to exhibit it as the object of our imitation. We must study to follow Him in everything, as dear children. The mind that was in Christ Jesus should also be in us; and in all labours, and trials, and duties, public and private, we should aim to be like Him, as we expect to be with Him in glory. To walk in "the footsteps of the flock of Christ;" to follow distinguished servants of God, as they followed Christ, is to imitate the Master. It is, moreover, to take the best course for arriving at the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Here we have a complete portraiture; and by copying after it daily and diligently, we will not fail to reach a measure of excellence which cannot otherwise be obtained, and which will produce salutary and permanent fruits.

I may only add on this topic, that while studying to put on an approved character, you should cherish a deep and absorbing sense of your responsibility to God for all your talents. Your time, your life, your opportunities—all are his; and all should be willingly consecrated to his service and the advancement of

¹ Hebrews vi. 1. The Greek expression may be literally rendered—"The beginning of the word of Christ," and doubtless refers to the "first principles of the oracles of God," mentioned before.

² Philippians iii. 14.

his glory. It is his "excellent and honourable work" to which He invites you. He now calls you to seek that character and those attainments which may save you from the doom of "the slothful and unprofitable servant," and which may ensure for you the commendation of the "good and faithful servant." Ere long you must stand in the presence of your Judge. The body will return to the dust whence it was taken, but the immortal part—your spirit, your minds will survive. You will stand before the judgment-seat in the character that you put on here; and on this will issue forth the sentence that will fix your everlasting state—that will send you away to tenant unquenchable fire, or that will bid you welcome to the endless and unspeakable joys of your Lord. Under such solemn impressions, may you go forward, transcribing into your spirit and life whatever is excellent and lovely, and of good report; and may your character be as the path of the just, resembling the shining light, which shineth more and more till the perfect day!

SECT. VI.—*Proper pursuit of Temporal Things.*

Religion is designed, not solely to communicate new spiritual principles, and to impress a new spiritual character—to introduce to heaven, and to prepare for its enjoyment. It is intended likewise to direct in relation to the things of the present life, and to render them conducive to the soul's felicity. "*Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"

The young who were dedicated to God in baptism, and who have taken upon them the vow of a Christian profession, have a part to act in human affairs, have worldly interests to consult, and must fill earthly connections; it is therefore of much importance to them to consider properly the position assigned them, and to discharge aright its various duties. It certainly never was intended that young professors, on recognizing the paramount claims of religion, and surrendering themselves to its influence, should forsake the active employments of life, or retire into a convent. They are called, it is true, to "come out and be separate," and to "overcome the world" by faith. But though not *of* the world, they are yet *in* it. They are required to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world." The relations of life they are to sustain in the spirit of true religion; the business of life they are to manage

on religious principles, and to holy ends; and their duty is to render all worldly things, with which they are conversant, subservient to the great end of promoting the Divine glory, and their own salvation.

These duties, although clearly enjoined in the Word, and obviously implied in a Christian profession, are of difficult performance. The young, especially the baptized youth of the Church, are exposed to no little danger in this quarter; and our own age and country present many temptations, arising from worldly pursuits, by which thousands are entangled and overcome. Some readily imbibe the erroneous and pernicious sentiment, that religion is a business only for the closet or the sanctuary or the Sabbath, and that it has nothing to do with the everyday concerns of life. The young are tempted on all sides to make worldly things their grand business, and to neglect "the one thing needful." Parents frequently train them more for the world than for God; and they enter into its relations, and embark in its employments, without any deep sense of their obligation to be the Lord's; and with the intention, whether secretly cherished or openly avowed, of making religion a mere secondary pursuit. In an age of refinement, and when the Spirit's influences are in a great measure withdrawn, the spirit of the world has, to a fearful extent, infected the Church. Covetousness has been pronounced "the master sin of the Church" in our day; and thousands take themselves credit for being religious, and think their interests are secure for eternity; who "*love this present world*;" and of whom it may be said, as of Ezekiel's hearers, even when attending upon religious ordinances, "Their hearts go after their covetousness."¹ The young need to be warned against a twofold danger here. The one is the neglect of the active duties of life; and the other the pursuit of temporal interests, so as to neglect religious duties, or to perform them in a formal manner. Both are clearly condemned in the Word of God, and both lead to ruinous consequences. The Scriptures represent slothfulness as a disposition and habit utterly opposed to the character of a faithful servant, and covetousness is declared to be "idolatry." The same high authority that enjoins us to be "diligent in business" directs us to be "servant in spirit, serving the Lord;" and declares, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."²

To guard the young against these extremes, and to direct them in a course in which they may enjoy the things of this life

¹ Ezekiel xxxiii. 31.

² 1 John ii. 15.

with a blessing, and in which the pursuit of them may *subserve*, instead of *retarding* their eternal interests, the following hints may be of service :—

First. Let the Saviour's direction be adopted as the leading maxim of the conduct, and constantly followed, "SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED."¹ Secure first an interest in Christ and his salvation. While others are "cumbered about many things," regard this as the "one thing needful," and choose it as the best portion, that cannot be taken away. Do not postpone the pursuit of salvation till an uncertain future. Resolve, before entering upon worldly concerns, to make sure a part in the kingdom of God, and follow this steadfastly, perseveringly, as the first and grand business of life, as the principal matter to be secured above all others. You must begin early to refrain from courses of conduct, however inviting, that would interfere with the attainment of this great end. In whatever you purpose to engage, make it a first inquiry how this may contribute to obtaining the kingdom. Relinquish at once whatever would mar your progress heavenward, however pleasing or profitable it may be to the flesh; and frequently take yourselves to task as to whether present pursuits are furthering spiritual interests. Abandon them freely, or slacken the pursuit, if they prevent your attention to spiritual duties, or if they damp a devotional spirit. In fine, seek "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" *early*. Seek them first in everything, seek them constantly, and make everything else over which you have control subservient to the diligent pursuit of Divine things. Thus will you realize the assurance that all other necessary good things shall be added. Reverse this order, and give undue prominence in the pursuit to the concerns of this world, and you have no promise of anything being conferred upon you with a blessing. But following this Divine counsel, you will have food and raiment, relations and possessions in life, with the favour of heaven. Your lot will be carved for you in sovereign wisdom and love; and whether you be high or low in the world, yours will be the blessing of Jacob,—*"the dew of heaven"* first, and then *"the fatness of the earth,"* and blessings *"to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills."* Impressed with the sense of Divine overflowing goodness, you will be enabled to say, *"The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."*²

¹ Matthew vi. 33.

² Psalm xvi. 6.

Secondly. In outward pursuits you should aim to be *active* and *diligent*. "The hand of the diligent maketh rich." This truth is confirmed in the history of mankind in innumerable instances, both in mental and secular pursuits. The active and diligent frequently get the start of others who have naturally more distinguished talents, or who enjoy superior outward advantages. From poverty, the diligent not unfrequently rise to possess a competence, and sometimes even to affluence. *Perseverando vinces*—by perseverance you will conquer—is a maxim which has been tested in a thousand instances, in all ages and in all ranks of society; and the young should adopt it, in whatever pursuit they may engage. It is not the hope of success alone, or chiefly, that should propel you to activity and diligence. Sustained industry is enjoined as a Christian duty. Time is never to be wasted; opportunities are to be improved to the utmost; and whatever our hand finds to do, we are to do it with our might. We are servants of Christ in our daily employments, having our stations assigned us by Him, and being accountable to Him in all things; and we should always dread the doom of "the slothful servant," and should aim to *increase*, by trading with our Lord's money. The habit of activity and diligence in outward pursuits, will influence the mind in relation to higher concerns. It will secure time for spiritual duties. It will excite to fervency in seeking the blessings of salvation; and it often leads to active efforts for advancing the Redeemer's glory in the world. Such a habit brings with it its own reward. They have "great peace" who love God's commandments. Faithful in that which is least, they are often entrusted with that which is greatest; and in the way of "giving all diligence," they reach to "the full assurance of hope," steadfast to the end.

Worldly affairs, however, should be conducted with *prudence*, and on principles of the *strictest integrity*. In the psalmist's description of a good man, it is said, "*He will guide his affairs with discretion.*"¹ This must be the characteristic of all who would honour God in the world, or succeed in temporal pursuits. The young, in setting out in life, are liable to be betrayed into imprudent courses; and none can tell how much evil to themselves, and injury to religion, may result from a single improvident step, from rash speculation, or from adopting plans of business without due foresight and consideration. Christian wisdom and genuine piety are displayed in weighing matters

¹ Psalm cxii. 5.

carefully before *acting*; and in avoiding resolutely the course that would peril religious principle or character, however alluring. "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way; but the folly of fools is deceit." "The prudent man looketh well to his going."¹ A fundamental maxim, which should ever be remembered in conducting worldly business, is, to "*owe no man anything*."² Punctuality to engagements, integrity in action, and sterling honesty, should ever characterize the Christian professor. These internal principles will be his safeguard against the destructive courses into which thousands are hurried by the spirit and tendency of the age, hasting to be rich; and the outward manifestation of such principles never fails to recommend religion, and to command respect and veneration for those who possess them.

Thirdly. You should own *God in everything*. Upon the Divine direction, support, and blessing, you are absolutely and constantly dependent. Destitute of God's favour, you can have no real success. Even prosperity will be destructive. Here there are life, comfort, peace; and apart from the blessing on high, the best outward condition can only be productive of dissatisfaction and misery. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."³ In choosing a condition of life, in entering upon any outward pursuit, *begin with God*.⁴ Seek counsel from above, and make the Divine glory the great end in all that you propose or do. Remember constantly, that without Him you can do nothing; and that what you obtain of outward things can minister satisfaction to you, and be really good for you, only in as far as you enjoy it with the Divine blessing. The counsel to Israel of old should be ever before you in the pursuit of temporal things, "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not

¹ Prov. xiv. 8, 15. ² Rom. xiii. 8. ³ Prov. iii. 6; Ps. xxxvii. 5.

⁴ We have a fine illustration of the importance of this maxim in an incident recorded in the life of Benjamin Franklin. When the delegates who met at the era of American Independence had spent some three or four weeks in deliberations and discussions on the proposed constitution of the United States, one morning Franklin is represented as having said to his fellow-deputies, that he saw they could make no progress, because they neglected to seek counsel of the God of nations; and he proposed that henceforth their meetings should be opened with prayer. This proposal, remarkable as coming from a man who was not distinguished for personal piety, was readily acceded to; and it is related, that the future deliberations were conducted in an amicable spirit, and that the labours of the delegates were speedily brought to a successful termination.

keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, &c. And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth.”¹ One rule you should always observe, “Engage in no pursuit in which you cannot with freedom invoke the Divine blessing;” attend to no business without cherishing a deep and abiding sense of your dependence upon God, and of your entire accountability. If you thus acknowledge Him “in all your ways,” He will order your footsteps aright. What you obtain in life will be doubly and trebly enhanced to you. It will come to you as a good gift from a father’s hand—itself a blessing—and at once the fruit and earnest of that favour which makes rich and adds no sorrow. What God gives or withholds will contribute to your highest benefit. “They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” “For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”²

Fourthly. In worldly pursuits, *avoid covetousness, and beware of undue anxiety.* “Covetousness” the highest authority pronounces to be “*idolatry*.”³ It is putting the world in God’s place, and yielding the homage of the heart to a base creature, instead of giving it to the Creator, “who is blessed for ever,” and who is supremely and exclusively entitled to it. The disposition thus strongly condemned is very insidious and hateful; and it prevails to an alarming extent at the present day, even within the Church. Under the plausible pretence of providing for things honest in the sight of men, on the plea of making provision for a family, and sometimes through avowed regard to the precept enjoining diligence in business, professed Christians pursue after the world with all avidity. Hence they seek for gain, each one from his quarter; they become unduly anxious about outward prosperity; they are fretful and discontented if they are not adding field to field and house to house; and they withhold more than is meet from Christ’s poor, and from the propagation of the Gospel. Few vices are more hateful than this, and few dispositions tend more directly to hinder progress in religion, or to make men formalists, or hypocrites, or apostates. It is not without solemn meaning, that the example of Judas among the apostles is held forth as he that

¹ Deuteronomy viii. 11, 17, 18.

² Psalm xxxiv. 10; lxxxiv. 11.

³ Colossians iii. 5.

betrayed the Saviour, and whose besetting sin was covetousness. The Apostle Paul writes the history of many an apostate, since his day, when he declares, "*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present evil world.*"¹

The young, in entering upon the pursuits of life, should therefore watch diligently and pray fervently against this evil. The least approach to a covetous disposition is to be shunned, as contact with an infectious malady. Hence the Spirit of God enjoins, "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have;" and the reason subjoined is urgent and impressive, "For He hath said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you."² Even in words, Christian youth should avoid that kind of conversation which has of late become so common among professors, of constantly talking of mere worldly things; and their whole spirit and conduct should give evidence that, through the power of the cross, they are crucified to the world, and the world unto them. The Saviour's plain and pointed direction is, "Be careful for nothing," and "*be content with such things as ye have.*" While diligent in business, the mind must not be "divided,"³ and we must not be unduly anxious about the future. No man can serve two masters; and homage to God and mammon are utterly incompatible. Of two sisters, both of whom were true disciples, and whom Jesus loved, one is reprov'd because she was "cumbered about many things;" and the other is approved and commended because, dismissing the world, she sat at Christ's feet, and had chosen "the good part" that shall not be taken away.⁴ Let the youth of the Church labour to possess the same spirit. They must be mortified to the world, and overcome it by faith, if they would evidence that they have obtained the better portion. Let them dismiss all undue anxiety about worldly prosperity. Let them ever cultivate a liberal spirit, and as their circumstances improve, let them give to Christ's cause as He has prospered them. Let them aim, in thoughts, desires, words, and conduct, to live above the world. Thus will they escape a master evil by which many are overcome; and in the fulfilment of the all-gracious promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," they will obtain a competent temporal provision; while internal peace, and the assured hope of salvation, will be a portion vastly superior to that of worldly men, "even when their corn and wine abound."

¹ 2 Timothy iv. 10.

² Hebrews xiii. 5.

³ The original word for "be careful," signifies to "divide the mind."

⁴ Luke x. 42.

Fifthly. Propose to yourselves constantly *the proper ends, for which Christians should seek the possession of earthly things.* These are not to gain high rank and distinction in the world, nor to pamper the flesh, nor to look for happiness where it never can be found, in mere earthly possessions and enjoyments ; nor to make provision for the future, though this within proper limits is allowable. There are higher and nobler ends which a Christian should propose to himself in the pursuit of worldly things ; and it is of much importance that the youthful professor should distinctly apprehend them at first, and ever afterwards keep them steadily in view.

To have a proper notion of these ends, there are two views which should be assumed as fundamental. 1. *In temporal things, we are but stewards of what we possess ;* and 2. *Every thing is sanctified to the Christian by the Word and by prayer.* Worldly possessions, be they large or small, are given to us in trust. They are our Lord's money, to be laid out according to his will, and so as to advance his glory ; and for them all, we must give an account to the Great Proprietor at his coming. If we appropriate them as our own, and either squander or neglect to improve our "talent," we can only expect the doom of the unfaithful—to be put out of the stewardship, to our disgrace and confusion. Christians, if they would be true to their profession and character, must acknowledge God in everything. Common avocations are exalted to Christian duties, when they are conducted in the spirit of prayer ; and our lot and relations, and possessions in life, are blessed when the Word is employed as our constant directory, and God's presence and blessing are habitually sought in them.

To the youthful professor, who has voluntarily sealed his renunciation of the world, the following *ends* may be noticed as important and indispensable to be proposed in the pursuit of earthly things. Let them be kept steadily in view, and they will at once furnish powerful motives to laudable exertion, and will raise the mind above the grovelling desire of carnal things.

We should labour with our hands, that we *may "have to give to him that needeth."* Our industry, as our spirit, should never be selfish. We should make it a distinct end, and assign it a high place in our designs, to have wherewith to supply the wants of the poor, to be "willing to communicate, ready to distribute." It is certainly more "blessed to give than to receive." By imparting to the necessitous, we make God our banker, and what we lend to Him, He will repay with double

and treble interest. By liberal things will the liberal stand. Riches shall ever be in his house. 'The blessing of the perishing shall come upon him; and his seed, it is promised, shall be "mighty" and "blessed."' Christians should purpose to themselves to give to the needy, as a distinct and primary object of their industry. They should consider that, as Christians, it is not left optional with them whether they shall impart to the poor or not, or in what proportion they shall give. What they possess is given to them under the reservation of supplying the claims of the needy that are presented to them; and they are to do this, "*according as God has prospered*" them. They are greatly honoured in such a service, as they are constituted almoners of the Divine bounty, and they are ever assured of a high recompense of reward in performing a pleasant duty.

Again. *The advancement of Christ's cause throughout the world has paramount claims upon the fruits of our industry.* The spread of the Bible, the instruction of the ignorant, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth, are ends of the highest and most exalted character. How ennobling to labour for such objects! In dedicating largely of the means which are furnished us in Providence for these purposes, we become co-workers with God, and enjoy the privilege which angels may envy us,—of spreading the Redeemer's renowned fame throughout the nations, and of bringing the world into subjection to the Lord's Anointed. Christians should aim to render all their temporal pursuits subservient to the promotion of this blessed object. Inspired prediction assures us, that at a future era of brightness and glory thus it shall be. The abundance of the sea shall be converted to Christ. The gold of Tarshish shall be dedicated to Him; and the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring presents. The results will be joyful and most glorious. 'The "bells of the horses," and every pot in Jerusalem, shall be "holiness to the Lord;" and the Redeemer's large and great dominion shall extend "from sea to sea," and from "the river to the ends of the earth."'² The youth of the Church should reckon it their highest privilege to be called to take part in hastening forward this blessed consummation. They should make the establishment of Christ's kingdom a principal object in their worldly pursuits. With enlarged liberality, they should readily contribute means for this purpose. Labouring for an end so glorious, they may expect a blessing upon their industry. Anticipating the happy results, they shall realize a peace in life,

¹ Psalm cxii.

² Zechariah xiv. 20, 21; Psalm lxxii. 8.

and a joy in death, unknown to others, in the reflection that they have had a part in an enterprize of love which engaged the counsels of eternity, which brought the Son of God from heaven to earth, and which shall one day fill the whole world with songs of salvation.

Waiving the consideration of other ends, we observe, in fine, that the youthful professor should, according to the Saviour's direction, *make to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,*¹ by doing all the good in his power with the worldly means entrusted to him, being an example to others of the pure and elevated benevolence of the Gospel. Here Christians are to stand forth in marked contrast to the world's selfishness. They should show that they value earthly substance not as an end, but as a means of promoting God's glory and doing good; that they can labour and deny themselves for the benefit of others; and that even in temporal pursuits they have learned not to live to themselves, but to Him who died for them and rose again. How beautiful and impressive would such examples be, in a world where such vast multitudes are the avowed worshippers of mammon! Let the young study to be, in this respect, "living epistles to be seen and read of all men." They would themselves be blessed in such a course. A large liberal spirit is itself a blessing to its possessor; and the benefits that an example of this kind would confer upon the Church, and upon human society in general, are incalculable.

Sixthly. In earthly pursuits, let it always be borne in mind, that the time is approaching, and it may be near, *when we must part with all worldly possessions and interests, and render up our final account.* To one who was presuming upon lengthened prosperity, it was said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."² In so short a period may we, too, be called to part with all earthly things. How miserable, if we have them for our only portion, or if we have been building upon them for satisfaction and happiness! Our true interest is to enter upon worldly pursuits, under the settled conviction that they are but *temporary and uncertain*; to manage them with the constant conviction that we may, any moment, be called to relinquish them wholly; and to seek to be prepared always for that account which we must certainly render of our stewardship. Above all, we should labour to secure *the true riches*, the possession that never fades away. The diligent pursuit of the heavenly inheritance will lessen, in our esteem, the value of earthly things.

¹ Luke xvi. 9.

² Luke xii. 20.

Affections set on things above will become more and more disengaged from the things of earth, and a treasure laid up in heaven will attract the heart thither, and will preserve it tranquil and fixed, amidst the ever-shifting scenes of human life. In this spirit, the young will learn to live above the world, and to overcome it by faith. They will render earthly pursuits and possessions subservient to their grand concern—the salvation of the soul. They will pass through the world as a wilderness, and as strangers and pilgrims; and when parting from it, they will leave it without regret. Having served their generation, according to the will of God, they will cheerfully exchange the labours and trials of time for the substantial joys and inexhaustible treasures of eternity.

In conclusion. The young should be thoroughly impressed with the truth, that *true religion exerts the most favourable influence upon worldly avocations, and tends, in various ways, to ensure worldly prosperity.* It may not, it is true, conduct the pious man to worldly wealth or honour. But in every condition blessings are upon the head of the righteous. Jacob, when a youth, and an exile from his father's house, was blessed in the family of an unnatural kinsman; and Joseph, amidst the changeful scenes of an eventful life, experienced the Divine favour ministering to him preservation, and conducting him to distinction and honour. True religion to the young will purify the understanding and exalt the intellect. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" "the knowledge of the Holy, that is understanding." It will preserve from vices that injure health, mar mental peace, and dissipate substance. It promotes health, establishes the reputation, and confers those principles and dispositions which have a tendency to conduct to the attainment and proper use of outward things. Even infidels have been constrained to acknowledge the superior excellence of Christianity, and its adaptation to promote, in the most extensive sense, the prosperity and happiness of mankind. "No religion," says Bolingbroke, "ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, as the Christian. The Gospel of Christ is one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, benevolence, and universal charity. Supposing Christianity to be a human invention, it is the most amiable and useful invention that was ever imposed upon mankind for their good." And Rousseau confesses, "That if all were perfect Christians, individuals would do their duty, the

people would be obedient to the laws, the chiefs just, the magistrates incorrupt, the soldiers would despise death, and there would be neither vanity nor luxury in such a state."

In the words of a distinguished author,¹ even in relation to temporal interests and blessings, may we not say, "*What a happy world would this be were Christians what they ought to be, and all men Christians!*" May it be your continual aim, youthful followers of the Lamb! to shine as lights in the world. May you study to conduct all your worldly engagements and pursuits under the presiding and controlling influence of true religion! May you learn, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," "to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world;" and may you find, in your own happy experience, that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come!"

¹ Dr Wardlaw's *Discourse on the Christian Character*.

CHAPTER V.

SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND INFLUENCE OF THE YOUNG UPON SOCIETY.

THAT is a solemn and impressive declaration made by the Apostle Paul, on which the youth of the Church should frequently reflect, "*None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*"¹ The social principle is implanted in the human heart by the Author of our nature; and in the case of every person it will seek its appropriate exercise. The young begin early to give indications of the existence of this principle. It exerts a powerful influence upon their life and conduct, an influence for good or evil, affecting not individuals merely, but communities likewise; and that not at the present time only, but also throughout future generations. Whether the young think it or not, their character and conduct will affect the character and destinies of others. They themselves will gradually, but surely, contract a resemblance to those with whom they associate. The connections which they form will, to a great extent, tend to mould their character, and will be sources to them of happiness or misery, for this world and the next. The Spanish proverb is just, as it is of most extensive application, "*Tell me with whom thou goest, and I will tell thee who thou art.*"

The young, it has been observed, are hardly aware, in any case, of the influence which society has upon themselves, or of the power which they are destined to exercise upon others; and yet, considering the happiness or misery that are inseparably connected with this influence, there is hardly any subject which deserves to be pressed more frequently upon their serious consideration. Youthful professors require especially to be warned and counselled in relation to the companions with whom they associate, and the influence which they exercise upon society. The world in which they live, and through which they pass to eternity, is evil; and if they fully enter into its connections, they

¹ Romans xiv. 7.

will speedily assume its form and fashion. Their lot will be with the world, and having chosen their portion here, they will forfeit the eternal inheritance.

The enemy of souls employs evil companions as a frequent and most effective means of leading astray the simple, of withdrawing numbers who were baptized in the Church from its fellowship, and of alluring them to destruction. It deserves, moreover, to be seriously considered, that it is not possible for a professor of religion to live in the world, and to produce no effect upon society around him. Either he must exert an influence for good, or his conduct and example will be mischievous. By his calling, he is "the salt of the earth," and he acts as a purifying and preserving element upon society; or, as the salt that has "lost its savour," he is himself rejected, and others encouraged by him, and hardened in neglect, are drawn through him to share the same condemnation. In the view of an influence so important, and of results so momentous, we regard it as peculiarly incumbent to counsel the young in relation to their connection with society, and to direct them in reference to the cultivation of a spirit which shall render them benefactors of their species.

SECT. I.—*Companions to be chosen by the Young.*

God, who implanted the social principle in man, and who requires his people to promote his glory in the world, as members of human society, has uttered many solemn and explicit declarations in his Word, in relation to the companionship which they are to cultivate. He has told his servants *whose* company they should choose, and *whose* they are to avoid. He has prescribed the nature of the intercourse which they are to maintain with others, and has in the plainest terms announced the consequences of obeying, or of disregarding, the Divine admonitions on this subject. The language of a saint is, "I am companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts;"¹ and all who have received the mind of Christ feel what the psalmist utters in another place, "To the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight."² The way of transgressors and of the righteous is placed in the most marked contrast; and the young are counselled to avoid the least approach to the former, and

¹ Psalm cxix. 63.

² Psalm xvi. 3.

to walk continually in the latter. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."¹ The prohibitions against associating with the wicked or the unworthy are frequent and most explicit: "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path."² "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"³ These declarations, and many others of similar import, that are everywhere scattered throughout the Sacred Volume, intimate how important God regards the companionship which his people form. They are as beacons set up to warn the young and inexperienced against the danger and ruin to which they are exposed from improper associations; and they are, at the same time, friendly guides, to direct the steps into the way of safety and peace. It might be sufficient that He who "knows what is in man," has thus plainly intimated his will, and has so frequently spoken on this subject, to lead all to be peculiarly guarded in relation to the companions which they should choose, and to be especially watchful against connections that are ensnaring and ruinous. Had God not seen the danger to which youth are exposed in this quarter, He would not have been at so much pains to point it so plainly that he may run who reads. Had He not known the influence of society in moulding character, and the certain ruin to which inconsiderate youth are often brought, through the seductions of companions, He would not have uttered so many solemn warnings. The announcements of the Word accord with the universal experience of mankind; and attention to them will be of unspeakable advantage in preserving them from the way of the "simple who pass on, and are punished."

The children of Christian parents, and the youth who have made a religious profession, need to give the most earnest heed to these counsels of the Holy One. To them they are addressed with peculiar affection, "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee." They are exposed to dangers

¹ Proverbs xiii. 20.

² 2 Corinthians vi. 14.

³ Proverbs iv. 14, 15; xxii. 24, 25; i. 10, 15.

in some respects greater than others, as the great enemy continually seeks an advantage against religion, by spreading snares for the feet of its professors ; and his instruments are everywhere and constantly at work, to draw away from the Church, to their company, those who are on Christ's side. The young of Christian families are, moreover, often *unsuspicious* ; and when to this it is added, that there are yielding principles in every heart, and that companions that tempt to neglect religion, or that lead astray from the paths of virtue, often present at first all that is pleasing to the youthful mind—that they have learned to flatter, and are practised to deceive, it will be seen how important it is to listen attentively to the counsels of heavenly wisdom, and early to employ them as maxims for the life and conduct.

The value of these scriptural declarations will be better appreciated when we advert, in the next place, to—

1. *The company which the young should carefully avoid.* As evil company are obviously to be reckoned the infidel, the immoral, and the profligate ; and any association with such is so utterly repugnant to the whole tenor of the scripture requirements, that it must be taken as implying the voluntary renunciation of Christian character, and a heart in love with wickedness. But, besides these, there are many others who are most unsuitable and dangerous companions for the youth of Christian families. All who are *destitute of vital piety*, are to be regarded as dangerous company ; and the visible neglect of religious duties is the evidence which should lead the young to avoid them. Such persons may be respectable in the world, pleasing in their manners, honourable and generous ; but, while the heart is averse to the claims of religion, and the life is uninfluenced by its power, and opposed to its requirements, these qualities render them only the more seductive and dangerous. The volatile and confiding spirit of the young, their fondness of pleasure, and unsuspiciousness of danger, render them peculiarly susceptible of injury from the frivolous and the gay ; and they who, by their polished wit and facetious humour, excite the laugh, and are the delights of convivial parties, are frequently the successful instruments of ruin to many young persons who have received a religious education. They are, in truth, the snares which the destroyer lays to take the feet of the simple ; and thousands are thus entangled, till escape becomes impossible. The young should be particularly on their guard against the solicitations of the irreligious. At whatever hazard,

even though they should be called unsocial, or branded as morose and mean-spirited, they must avoid familiar intercourse with those who forget God and contemn religion. An enemy to God can never be a friend to man ; and they who would be religious, can never form friendships, or cultivate intercourse, however casual, with the ungodly, but at the imminent peril of denying the faith, and casting away from them the fear of God.

2. There is still another class against which the young, who would be on Christ's side, need to be warned, in choosing their companions. These are they who make some profession of religion, *but who do not manifest a Christian spirit, and who bring not forth spiritual fruits.* They were baptized in infancy, but they give no evidence of having recognized their baptismal vow, or of having given themselves to the Lord. They may be in the Church, but they are barren branches there. They are formal or lukewarm in their profession, worldly in their spirit, and unprofitable in their conversation. A large portion of their intercourse with others consists in gossip or scandal. Some of them, while following religion, have evidently their hearts in the world. Their conversation savours of the earth ; they are fond of light company, or are given to amusements ; they delight in dress and other vanities ; and, in fine, they give no doubtful evidence that they are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." Association with such persons cannot be formed or maintained without manifold danger to the young, who have vowed to consider religion the one thing needful. It will blunt the edge of devotional feelings ; it will gradually undermine right principles ; and it generally has the baleful effect of bringing down to the same level, of inducing formality and lukewarmness in religion, and of assimilating to those with whom we consort, the unfruitful and hypocritical. There is need of much wisdom and discretion here. In a period when vital Christianity is low in the Church, and the Spirit's influences are in a great measure withdrawn, the young should be aware, that the most effectual way of weakening in their hearts religious impressions, and of rendering them careless and lifeless, is to love the company of those who pursue pleasure as their chief good, while they profess religion ; or of those who bring forth no living fruits in their profession. It is the judicious remark of Bolton, "Throw a blazing firebrand into snow or rain, and its brightness and heat will be quickly extinguished ; so let the liveliest Christian plunge himself into sinful company, and he

will soon find the warmth of his zeal abated, and the tenderness of his conscience injured."

The young should seriously consider, before they commit themselves to such company, the great and manifold evils to which they will be thereby exposed. There is the strongest probability that you will become like your companions, and your character and conduct will be moulded after theirs. You may be insensible to such danger, and at first you may even positively disapprove of the courses which those whom you make your companions follow. You may think your faith too firm to be shaken, and your resolutions too powerful to be moved; but you may depend upon it, you are launched in a perilous course, when you court such society, and enter into such company. With habits but imperfectly formed, and a character tender and facile, how can you expect to stand where thousands have already fallen? How will you be able to resist insinuations and influences, which find powerful allies in the corruptions of your own hearts, and which are among the most plausible and potent of the wiles of the enemy? The testimony of Him who knows what is in man is, that "*evil communications corrupt good manners.*"¹ Ensnared by wicked company, your esteem for religion, its truths, and duties, and privileges, will lessen. You will be led, step by step, into practices which are condemned in the Scriptures, and opposed to true Christianity; and you may at length be plunged into the gulf of loathsome immorality, and brought to sit down in the seat of the scorner. Temptations to neglect duty and commit sin will acquire tenfold force by being presented by those whom you have chosen as intimate friends. The torrent of evil example will carry you headlong, and you may be left to pursue courses of wickedness which you would once have shuddered to contemplate. Even when the companions which the young choose are not the openly wicked, when they are the thoughtless, and those who have no relish for serious godliness, the danger is great, the influence upon the growth of piety in the heart is frequently most deleterious. What are usually termed "harmless follies," are in reality sinful pleasures. The soul delighting in them is lifted up to vanity, and speedily becomes cold to the Saviour and his love. The relish for Divine things is weakened, and active exertions in religion are relinquished. Devotion becomes burdensome, and devotional habits are laid aside. The ways of declension and apostasy are always downhill, and neglect of commanded duties, most

¹ 1 Corinthians xv. 33.

commonly, and often speedily, is followed by acts of overt and flagrant transgression. The Bible neglected, secret prayer unattended to, the house of God relinquished, and pious friends forsaken, are the first indications that the individual has forgotten solemn vows and departed from God; the next steps are, in general, immorality in practice, and proclaimed hostility to religion.

The termination of such a course is fearful. To become a mere formalist in religion, to be barren and unfruitful in the ways of the Lord, is at once to be chargeable with aggravated sin, and to undergo the punishment of sin. It is a sad judgment to be given up to a spirit of backsliding; and few sentences are more awful than that which is recorded against him who is allured into the way of sinful or careless companions, "*Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.*"¹ Temporal interests are often seriously affected by means of evil company, and habits are contracted which inevitably lead to their destruction. Finally, it should never be forgotten that the end of these courses is "*death.*" The "*companion of fools shall be destroyed.*"² In righteous retribution, it is allotted that those who sin together shall suffer together, and those whose characters are assimilated on earth by companionship in wickedness, shall be mutual tormentors amid the punishments of eternity. The *tares* are *bound in bundles* when they are cast into the furnace of wrath. Multitudes, vast beyond expression, have been ruined for both worlds by the influence of evil company.³ Not unfrequently their names and characters are recorded with infamy in this world, and they are set up as beacons to warn youth of the danger of friendship in the ways of sin, and of association with transgressors. And, amidst the unspeakable woes of the future state of punishment, what heart can conceive the aggravated miseries of those who, having forsaken God—"the Guide of their youth"—and disregarded his counsels, choose their lot with his enemies, and who shall be condemned to suffer with them the fierceness of his anger for ever? Let the young ponder these things solemnly and frequently now; let them constantly shun the path of the destroyers, and never, in any instance, take for

¹ Hosea iv. 17.

² Proverbs xiii. 20.

³ James, in his *Christian Father's Present*, remarks—"In a large and populous town, where Providence has fixed my lot (Birmingham), I have had an extensive sphere of observation; and I give it as my decided conviction and deliberate opinion, that improper associates are the most successful means which are employed by Satan for the ruin of men's souls."

their companions those who discover no delight in true religion.

3. *The company to be chosen by the young* deserves to be noticed. On a certain memorable occasion, when some of the apostles had been injuriously treated by the Jewish rulers, and when they were dismissed from an unrighteous tribunal, it is said, "*they went to their own company,*" and they forthwith engaged in acts of devotion ; and, forgetting their trials, rejoiced that they "were counted worthy to suffer shame" for the name's sake of Christ.¹ Subsequently, when Peter was delivered, by a miraculous interposition, from prison and from death, and was conducted by an angel out of the verge of danger, as soon as he became conscious of his deliverance, he went to the assembly for prayer of his companions in the faith and patience of Christ. The principle thus indicated is characteristic of all who belong to the spiritual family of God, and the example presented in these instances is worthy of constant imitation. The young who profess religion should take true disciples for their "own company." Among them their affections should find rest and satisfaction. They should love them "with a pure heart fervently." They should cultivate habitual intercourse with them ; and whether in joy or in sorrow, in labour or in suffering, they should repair to them as their chosen society, as tried and much-loved friends. Joys are enhanced and increased by being shared with those whom we love ; and sorrows will be greatly alleviated and lightened by the sympathies of fellow-disciples.

As the young, when setting out in a Christian profession, should be aware that the number of true disciples is but few in the world, and should be particularly careful in the choice of companions, a few hints in relation to the company which they should choose may not be unsuitable.

The grand principle which should guide them in this matter is, *to take those for companions by whom they may expect to be improved in all spiritual attainments*—by whom they may be benefited for this world and for the world to come. Such are the truly pious ; and whether they are those who, being in early life, have dedicated to God the dew of their youth, or are venerable for the crown which heavenly wisdom has placed on their old age, they are worthy to be taken as chosen friends. The former will be valuable helps to the young, as similarity of age will lead to familiarity and confidence, and the warmth of

¹ Acts iv. 23.

youthful affections and juvenile activity will excite to useful labours ; and intercourse with the latter will confer the benefits of godly experience, and will attract by the example of tried virtue. Aged disciples may, by their prayers, instructions, and example, be of singular use to the young ; and it may be safely affirmed, that the youth who have grown in grace, and been useful in their day, have all set a high value upon intercourse with aged believers.

Again. The *humble and self-denied* are the proper companions for youthful professors. Humility and self-denial are among the first and most important lessons of our holy religion. If we do not learn, and habitually practise them, we cannot be Christ's disciples. They are, however, contrary to our nature ; and the sanguine temperament of youth combines with allurements in the world to render these dispositions of no easy attainment. As subsidiary to the work of Divine grace, proper companions are of much value in calling into exercise such a temper of mind, and in giving it the force of a habit. There is something peculiarly attractive and lovely in the flower that blooms in the shade ; and the "lily of the valley" is beautiful for the delicacy of its tints, and for the position in which it is found. By associating with the humble, pride of heart, which is indigenous in human nature, is rooted out, and humility, a lovely exotic, a plant of paradise, will take its place, and shed upon the whole character a delightful fragrance. Habits of self-denial are greatly strengthened by associating with those who have learned to practise this disposition. How important, therefore, is it to have the force of the example of familiar friends to impel us to the cultivation of the chief of virtuous dispositions !

Furthermore. The companions which the young will find profitable, are those who *cherish habitual reverence for Divine institutions, and who practise benevolence toward men*. They love the sanctuary, they converse daily with the Word, they value prayer, they improve opportunities, and they have a heart to love all men, and to do them good. They are fearers of God, and benefactors of men. There is an eminent advantage in going to God's house in company with the wise and the devoted. God "delights in the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of Jacob." Our companions should be chosen with the view of enjoying through them "*the communion of saints*;" and they with whom we most frequently converse should be travellers to Mount Zion, who will animate us in the way, and

impart to us spiritual benefit in the social exercises of religion. The ascetic, or the selfish, can never confer any large measure of strength or comfort upon those who associate with them. The heart of a companion glowing with love to God and man, will warm the hearts of others who come in contact with it. "Iron sharpeneth iron ; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."¹

And lastly. The *devoted, and those who have the lively hopes of future bliss*, are especially worthy to be taken as chosen companions. Singleness of heart is an eminent quality ; and a heart and treasure in heaven are of inestimable benefit to their possessor, and to such as enjoy his confidence and share his friendship. Devotedness to Christ and his service cannot exist without leading the person who is so distinguished to desire and to labour to bring others to be devoted too. In such company, a person with a right spirit breathes in a purer atmosphere. Intercourse with zealous servants of Christ elevates above the earth, and its low aims and pursuits, and raises even above the ordinary measure of Christian attainment. Things heavenly and eternal appear in their immense magnitude and importance, and as objects of powerful attraction. Associating with such companions, the young will learn to live above the world, and to overcome it by faith. Their characters will be purified and exalted, and they will be enabled to say with the apostle, "*Our conversation is in heaven, whence also we look for the Saviour.*"²

The views which have been given about the choice of companions become doubly important when applied to the choice of a companion for life—when referred to the marriage-state. This subject would require a separate and lengthened consideration. For the present, a passing hint or two may suffice. The Scripture injunction is most plain and positive in reference to the formation of the conjugal relation among Christians—"BE YE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS."³ Believers are elsewhere enjoined to "*marry only in the Lord.*" This is the direct Scripture-command on the subject, neglect of which has been productive of incalculable evils in families, as well to the parties themselves as to their posterity.

¹ Proverbs xxvii. 17.

² Philippians iii. 20.

³ 2 Corinthians vi. 14. The negative command here given is a prohibition of intimate fellowship with idolaters and unbelievers in general, but there can be no doubt that it forbids the marriage of Christians with unbelievers—the conjugal relation being often represented under the figurative expression of *yoking together*.

Many weighty and most solemn considerations enforce obedience to this precept upon those who propose to enter into the conjugal relation. The marriage of professors with the irreligious is represented in the Bible as the source of innumerable evils. The intermarriage of the people of God with the descendants of Cain filled the old world with wickedness, and brought the flood upon the ungodly. Strange wives turned away Solomon's heart; and the reason assigned why many of the kings of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord is, that by marriage they had entered into idolatrous connections. The evils that flow from professors of religion forming improper conjugal unions are so numerous and fearful, that they may be justly regarded as the punishment for violating a plain and explicit precept. In any case, it is very sad for a professor of religion to become voluntarily connected with one who has no love to religion, so as to become "one flesh;" but in the face of a positive Divine prohibition, it is aggravated criminality, and the punishment is, in consequence, peculiarly marked and severe. The decline of piety, the neglect of domestic religion, and sometimes total apostasy, mark at once the danger, and show God's indignation against disobedience. Disappointment of hopes—strife in families—and the irreligion and ruin of children, are frequently the melancholy results of forming improper marriages, overlooking the requirements of God's law. In general, it may be affirmed, that when the marriage relation is thus improperly formed, the hope that the religious party shall improve the other is exceedingly faint, or is often doomed to bitter disappointment; and spiritual duties connected with the conjugal state cannot be suitably performed. The blight of heaven often follows such connections, and lasting and serious injury accrues to individuals and families. Let the young be particularly guarded on this subject. In a case where youthful passion too generally gets the start of judgment, and persons are prone to follow the impulse of inclination before asking counsel of the Lord, there is need of no ordinary caution. The conjugal state is honourable, and brings to the parties many comforts, when formed in the fear of the Lord, and with a single eye to God's glory and blessing. Let youthful professors who propose to enter into it be especially jealous of themselves. Let them ask direction from on high, and carefully follow it, and thus may they expect the blessing. Companions for life—both one in Christ—will be mutual helpers of each other's joy. Domestic happiness is often the

reward of obedience; and to be "heirs together of the grace of life," is the high recompense of those who have been careful to marry only in the Lord.

4. Two or three plain additional directions, *in relation to the manner of maintaining intercourse with others, so as to render companionship profitable*, may be of benefit to the young.

First of all. *Beware of forming hasty friendships.* A maxim of one of the wise men of Greece was, "That that person was to be accounted happy, who had found, during life, one true friend." While it must be admitted that the power of Christianity has effected what the most refined heathen philosophy never could accomplish, still the young should lay it down as a fixed principle, that it is not easy to find friends that are worthy to be trusted in all cases, or that will remain steadfast under every trial. The young should watch against an excessive fondness for company. They should firmly resolve rather to live and walk alone than to join themselves to improper companions. They should learn to delight in retirement, as furnishing opportunities for reflection, and study, and devotion. In domestic society, and in intercourse with relatives, they should look for satisfaction and delight; and here they should study both to derive and confer benefit. Beyond this endeared circle, let them range with special caution. Let them select their companions with watchful care, and be especially guarded, lest their affections or passions should get the start of the judgment, and lead them, without due consideration, into connections that are improper. The Saviour's maxim is, "Beware of men;" and this is peculiarly important to the young in reference to the choice of companions.

Secondly. The safest way in intercourse *with others, is to be reserved at first*; and afterwards to *become free and confidential*, when you have made trial of the worth of those with whom you associate. You will thus avoid committing yourself to those from whom you may afterwards see reason to withdraw. You will secure your retreat from connections which may turn out to be unsuitable. Your attachment will be stronger, and more productive of mutual benefit, when it arises from ascertained worth; and, based on judgment and experience, it may reasonably be expected to yield satisfaction and happiness.

Thirdly. *Remember to consult diligently those in whom you may repose implicit confidence, in relation to the choice of companions.* Your parents, who have your welfare at heart, have a paramount right to be asked on the subject. The young

are very prone to overlook parental advice in a matter of this kind ; and not unfrequently the friendship formed without it, or even with a consciousness that godly parents would disapprove of it, is a source of bitter and lasting misery. Attend, likewise, to the counsels of a faithful minister ; and, as you have opportunity, solicit them for your guidance, before your affections are engaged, and you have contracted intimacies which you may find it difficult afterwards to dissolve. Above all, consult the directions of the inspired Word, and seek counsel from God. He alone can preserve you from all possible danger, and can infallibly direct your steps. Let your companions be chosen, and your friendships formed, as under the All-seeing eye, and so as to meet his approval. Let the friends of God be your chosen friends. Thus will you walk with wise men, and yourself become wiser ; and your fellowship with the excellent of the earth will be an eminent means of conducting you to the highest of all privileges—"Fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."¹

Lastly. You should aim to render your intercourse with companions *profitable to them and to yourself*. As there is danger to the young in an excessive fondness for company, so there is no little danger *in company*, of receiving injury ourselves, and of inflicting injury upon others. The social habit, if not under proper restraint, may lead to the dissipation of time, to a taste for amusements and frivolous engagements ; and may thus hinder secret devotion, and unfit the mind for the serious and active duties of life. The young, by indulging the social propensity to excess, or by not watching to turn social intercourse to some profitable account, may become tempters to their fellows, and may themselves receive irreparable injury. Things which are in themselves lawful are frequently inexpedient ; and there are few things that have a greater tendency to enervate the mind, undermine vital piety, and lead into courses of dissipation and frivolity, than the intercourse of companions, when it is not conducted on strictly religious principles. The author is acquainted with a case, in which an estimable minister, on beginning his labours in a large town, was drawn to take part frequently in evening convivial parties, which were held in the houses of his people, for the avowed purpose of religious conversation ; but from which he contracted the love of intoxicating liquors, until his constitution gave way, and he came to a premature grave, leaving behind him a widow and children unprovided for.

¹ 1 John i. 3.

Let the young consider social intercourse as a talent which they are under solemn obligations to occupy for the honour of Christ and the benefit of others. The observation of the excellent Hervey when, towards the close of life, he had discontinued his visits to the houses of the neighbouring gentry, and he gave as his reason, "I am resolved to go into no company that does not afford entertainment for my Master as well as myself," will form a good rule for your conduct. Be select in your companions, and when going into company, seek to bring the great Master of assemblies with you. Guard against frivolous conversation; and avoid, as a most pernicious habit to yourselves and others, scandal and idle gossip. The conversation of Christians in company should be *spiritual*, such as characterized the fearers of the Lord in the days of Malachi: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and that thought on his name."¹ The speech should be "with grace, seasoned with salt." The tongue, which is man's glory, should be employed in honouring God, edifying the hearers, and exciting and animating the hearts of Zion's travellers.

If any difficulty is experienced in keeping out vain conversation, or in bringing in suitable discourse, a good rule is to introduce the Scriptures. Conversation upon the great mysteries revealed in the Bible will always be found profitable. The "decease" to be accomplished "at Jerusalem," was the theme of conversation of the most august assembly that ever convened on earth—that which met on the Mount of Transfiguration. While the assembled disciples talked together of Christ's resurrection, the Saviour himself appeared in the midst of them, and said, "Peace be unto you." Intercourse on such themes will still minister grace to the hearers, and will introduce to the highest of privileges—the gracious presence of Christ in the assemblies of his people.

The intercourse of the young in company should, finally, be *prayerful*, and should *excite to works of usefulness*. Association, to be blessed, must be sanctified by the Word and by prayer. Companionship should be improved as presenting favourable opportunities for united prayer. The fellowships formed and maintained by frequent intercourse at the mercy-seat, promise to be lasting and happy. There, too, good designs cherished will propel to a course of holy and vigorous action.

¹ Malachi iii. 16.

Christians in general, and the young especially, should consider, when they meet, what the Master, whom they profess to love, would have them to do. In united counsel and combination there is strength ; and it is incalculable what benefits might accrue to the Church and the world, were those who have made a Christian profession to improve their meetings together, by concerting plans for the revival of true religion, and for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world ; and were they to go forth with the warmth imparted by fraternal intercourse, vigorously to execute them. If these views appear too serious, if such intercourse seems too strict, we have only to remind the young, that they cannot be Christ's, if they do not aim in all places and on all occasions to act for Him ; and to ask them to ponder the scriptural maxims that should regulate all Christian intercourse, " Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel ;" " For our conversation is in heaven ; whence also we look for the Saviour."¹

SECT. II.—*Public Spirit—Engagement in Benevolent Exertions.*

A fundamental law of our holy religion requires all who profess it to live not to themselves. Universal benevolence is the spirit which it breathes, and its prevailing character. This spirit Christians are required to display. They are set up as " lights in the world," and as " the salt of the earth ;" and they are commanded to " do good to all men as they have opportunity, especially to them who are of the household of faith."²

The entire absence of a public spirit certainly indicates that the person has not imbibed the mind of Christ. Its weakness will show that vital religion is not prospering ; and to have no hand in benevolent efforts, will prove that the heart is cold in relation to a work which must ever engage the believer's fervent prayers and ceaseless activities—the promotion of the Redeemer's glory in the earth. On the contrary, wherever personal religion is thriving, the heart will be enlarged ; a public spirit will be cherished and displayed ; and rising above selfish interests and aims, the individual will discover that he lives for others more than to himself, and that the interests of Christ's kingdom are to him far above all worldly ends and all private personal concerns.

¹ Philipians i. 27 ; iii. 20.

² Galatians vi. 10.

While a public spirit and benevolent exertion should constantly characterize the disciple of Christ, there are particular seasons, such as the present, when he is specially required to be thus distinguished. Opportunities, numerous and varied, are now presented for spreading the truth, and vigorous exertions and costly sacrifices are needed for carrying forward the work. A great cause is pending between Christ and the world; and there can be no neutrality in relation to it, for he that is not with Christ is against Him. Vast multitudes of the human family are in a neglected, perishing condition; and the Christian forfeits his claim to be considered a follower of the Saviour, who can look on with callous indifference, and do nothing to save them. Ours is a day of excitement and energetic action. The field has been clearing for a conflict between the great contending parties, of the most singular character; and the most solemn results; and the hosts of darkness and the friends of truth are rapidly taking their sides, and falling into rank. The last half century has witnessed the origin and progress of schemes of Christian benevolence, that embrace in their wide extent the whole of the world's population. The miserable condition of men without the Gospel has been revealed; and every year the cry addressed to the Church from tribes of perishing men, has become louder and more importunate, "Come over and help us." The work to be accomplished—the relief of moral wretchedness at our doors, the revival and extension of the Church, and the evangelization of Jew and Gentile, is of such magnitude, as to demand the consecration of all the energies and resources of the Church. The importance of the *division of labour* is, moreover, now so generally admitted, and the nature of the work itself is so fitted to furnish employment for talents of every kind, that there is ample scope for all; and none can refuse to take a part in this enterprise of mercy without incurring aggravated criminality.

If ever there was a time in which the Church was more loudly called than another to "arise and shine, because her light is come,"¹ that time is the present. If there ever was a period which specially requires that Christians should shake off sloth, rise above selfishness, live not to themselves, and learn to spend and be spent for the promotion of Christ's cause, it is the day in which we live, when truth and error are struggling for the mastery, and the King of Zion is coming forth to claim the nations all for his inheritance. Neglect this work, and not only will the guilt of disobedience to the plainest and

¹ Isaiah lx. 1.

most solemn commands of the Saviour be incurred, but doors of opportunity will be closed, and the enemy, aroused to ten-fold activity, will triumph. Arise, on the contrary, to a proper sense of the duty which present privileges and obligations demand, and a mighty impulse will be given to the propagation of the truth, and results the most salutary and glorious will follow self-denied and sustained exertions.

Earnestly desiring that the rising youth of the Church may be led to take an influential part in the work to which they are specially called in their day, we shall notice briefly *the distinguishing features of a public spirit*, and then *the obligations* of the young to cultivate and display it.

1. Public spirit, first of all, is *opposed to all selfishness and indolence*. We must willingly deny ourselves for the good of others. We must relinquish ease, and part with what may appear to be necessary to ourselves, and choose a course of toil and painful sacrifices, in maintaining a cause which we esteem better than life. Feeling that we are not our own, and that nothing that we have is properly ours, we cheerfully surrender all to Him, *whose we are, and whom we serve*, and regard it as our great privilege to be employed in his work. In the light of the Saviour's glory, which we seek to advance, we will appear as nothing; and embracing the whole family of mankind in the range of an ample benevolence, our own private concerns and interests will be felt to be of little moment. Rather, we shall account it our highest interest to be servants of all, and to become all things to all men for their good, and to live only to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us. A public spirit is such a spirit of self-denial and unceasing activity, as influenced the great doctrinal apostle when he declared, "To the Jew, became I as a Jew," &c. "I am debtor both to the Jews, and to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise and unwise." "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus."¹

2. A public spirit is exercised in taking *a deep interest in all that concerns the house of God, in all that pertains to the condition of fellow-men, and to the Redeemer's glory*. The emphatic declaration of the Saviour, expressive of his own jealous concern for the sanctuary, was, "THE ZEAL OF THINE HOUSE HATH EATEN ME UP." The person who has, in any measure, imbibed the mind of Christ, will grieve for the corruptions of the

¹ Romans i. 14; Acts xx. 24.

Church, mourn over her divisions and desolations, and seek her prosperity above his chief joy. Whatever of personal effort and outward means he has it in his power to contribute for the house of God, he will willingly furnish. He will labour to heal the breaches of the sanctuary; and as all blessings are dispensed to our world by means of the spread of pure religion, and in connection with scriptural ordinances, he will seek the universal establishment of the Church. He will not take rest to himself, and he will give the Lord no rest, "till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." * The distresses and wants of humanity cannot but affect the heart of a good man; and a person of a public spirit will not only learn to feel for others' woe, but will be prompted to active exertions to relieve them. Where there is wrong to be redressed, or suffering to be alleviated, he will be ready to give himself to the service. The injuries of the slave, the groans of the oppressed, the wants of the needy, will affect his heart; and he will stand prepared to devote his time, and to contribute his substance and his personal efforts, to mitigate or terminate the miseries of fellow-men. Towards those in prison, and who are suffering for the truth's sake, he feels and acts as bound with them; and in whatever form human misery meets the view, he is constrained to energetic action, in endeavouring to lighten the load, remembering that he himself also is in the body. As moral miseries are immeasurably greater and more destructive than those which are material and outward, true benevolence will aim chiefly to apply moral and spiritual remedies for the maladies which sin has caused, and to banish sin from the world. It will labour to pluck up the root, and thus to destroy the poison-tree, and remove all its baleful fruits. It will try to cast the purifying salt into the fountain, that thus the waters may be healed, and that there may be no more barren land or death. Genuine Christian benevolence will find ample range in the work of instructing the ignorant, in seeking the removal of great systems of error and idolatry, and in diffusing the light of heavenly truth throughout the world; and in other departments of the enterprise of mercy, the man of a public spirit will seek and obtain congenial employment. It is "more blessed to give than to receive." This will be assumed as a fundamental maxim with those who have the spirit of true Christian philanthropy, and their whole lives will be its constant and appropriate illustration.

* Isaiah lxii. 7.

3. A public spirit is, in fine, *conformity to the example of Christ*. His was unwearied, devoted, self-sacrificing benevolence. His bowels of compassion yearned for the afflicted and the wretched. He was frequent in scenes of sorrow, and suffering, and bereavement; around Him were often collected groups of the diseased, labouring under various maladies, and He healed them all. He had compassion upon the multitudes, when they were in want; and though He himself was often an hungered, He opened the stores of his benevolence liberally, and supplied them. His journeys on foot through the land of Judea, his manifold privations, his enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and all the complicated sufferings to which He willingly submitted, when prosecuting his mission of love, attested the lofty benevolence that characterized the Man, our Elder Brother. He has left us an example that we should follow his steps. In the life and character of Christ is the pure perfect model of benevolence and philanthropy which, while it displays the heart of God towards sinful, miserable human beings, embraces in its expansive regards man's most important interests, the sufferings of his body, the evils of his outward condition, the moral diseases and wants of his soul, and his immortal hopes and destinies. What a lovely copy to transcribe! This spotless model, Christians are called to imitate; and these are unquestionably the most ennobled of the species, who are most nearly conformed to its prominent features, and who follow the Saviour in the public spirit which He so wonderfully displayed, in a life of pure and self-denying benevolence.

I. OBLIGATIONS TO CULTIVATE A PUBLIC SPIRIT.

1. The OBLIGATIONS which lie upon the youth of the Church to cultivate a public spirit, and to engage actively in works of benevolence, are numerous and weighty. The maxim of the devoted Cotton Mather deserves to be adopted as a settled principle of great value, by all Christian youth, in entering on a religious profession, "*A power and opportunity to do good, not only gives a right to the doing of it, but makes the doing of it a duty.*" This power and opportunity you have, and for their use you are solemnly responsible. To you have been entrusted not one, but many talents. Your early dedication and Christian instruction, the Bible which from childhood has been put into your hands, and your connection with the Church of Christ, these require that you should bear much fruit to God,

and that you should be extensively useful to men. Within the Church, your consistent example should lead others to confess the power of true religion, and your zeal should provoke many. In the world, you should shine as lights; and you will remember, that when Christians are enjoined to be "perfect, as their Father in heaven is perfect," the direction is enforced by the example of the Divine benevolence. God sends his rain, and causes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, upon the just and the unjust. The young should early "determine to do all the good they can, and to labour to leave the world better than they found it."¹

Limited influence, under a right direction, will frequently be productive of most salutary effects; and holy resolutions formed early, and after due deliberation, have often left a permanent impression upon the character, and led to the execution of works of lasting utility. Of this we have a striking example in the justly-celebrated Jonathan Edwards, whose remarkable "*Resolutions*," already referred to, may be said to contain the germ of his future eminence. In a less distinguished, but still important rank, may be mentioned Harlan Page, of America, whose early lively impressions of the power of Divine truth, and whose youthful resolutions to be wholly devoted to Christ, impelled him to a career of humble but extensive usefulness for which hundreds—the fruits of his self-denied and unwearied labours—had reason to bless God."²

2. The young should, moreover, consider that it is of the highest consequence that a *spirit of active benevolence should be cherished and exercised early*. It has been observed even about little children, that if they manifest a selfish disposition early, they are rarely distinguished for generosity or benevolence in future life. Youth is the appropriate season for cultivating a public spirit; and if this fair flower does not appear then, in few cases will it flourish or produce fruit afterwards. Let the youthful professor be selfish or indolent, and he will rarely give himself afterwards to make sacrifices for the good of others, or

¹ James's *Christian Father's Present*, p. 223.

² The Memoirs of Thomas Cranfield, and Sarah Martin, in humble life, and of the Countess of Huntingdon, and Mrs Fry, in a more exalted station, supply striking instances of genuine Christian philanthropy and devotedness. The two former are given in the publications of the Tract Society; and the principal outlines of the character and labours of all the four, and of other excellent individuals, are presented in James's *Earnest Church*, a work which deserves to be attentively read and seriously pondered by the members of the Church. It will amply repay a diligent and frequent perusal.

enter with alacrity upon a course of benevolent exertion. To be a blessing in the world when in it, and to be regretted and lamented when removed from it, is an honourable object of youthful ambition. It has been beautifully remarked: "Selfishness is its own curse—it is a starving vice. The man that *does* no good, *gets* none. He is like the heath in the desert, neither yielding fruit, nor seeing when good cometh—a stunted, dwarfish, miserable shrub."

3. Consider that, as professed disciples of Christ, *you are placed in the world for the purpose of doing good*, and there are numberless occasions in which a spirit of benevolence may be exercised. Christians are redeemed *out* of the world; but they are placed *in* "this present evil world," that they may exemplify the Divine benevolence, and serve their generation by the will of God. With the Gentile world bowing down to dumb idols, the Jewish people still in unbelief, the votaries of Antichrist wondering after the beast, and multitudes of the ignorant and unconverted and immoral in Christian lands, what loud calls to benevolent exertion are presented to the Christian? In view of all this moral misery, and surrounded by the sufferings of humanity, and by the desolations of the sanctuary; with the ignorant to be instructed, the wretched to be relieved, and the Church to be revived, how can a person pretend to be a follower of Christ, and remain selfish or apathetical? Young disciples! you should consider it as your errand into the world to do all the good in your power. You should labour to turn many to righteousness; and you should feel, that if you act differently, you forfeit all claim to Christian character, and are unworthy to bear the Christian name. A selfish Christian is an anomaly. A "slothful servant," who hides his talent in the earth, and aims not to benefit others, is pronounced a "wicked servant." Seek that your character may be free from the least imputation of this vice. By the manifestation of a public spirit, aim to show yourselves worthy of that Master whose name alone is excellent; and declare, by continual benevolent efforts, that you are employed in the works of which He so much approves, that you have chosen the course in which He so greatly delights.

4. *The highest interest and honour of the young are inseparably connected with a public spirit, and with benevolent exertion.* There is the "luxury of doing good;" and the happiness that flows from the exercise of genuine benevolence, is of the purest

and most ennobling kind. "To speak truth, and to do good," were, in the esteem of the heathen, most godlike qualities. "Virtue," it has been said, "is its own reward;" and it rarely fails to bring with it a present recompense. The consciousness of living, not to one's self, but to Him to whom we owe all; to relieve the distressed, and enjoy the blessing of him that was ready to perish; and to witness any fruit arising from the seeds of benevolence that were sown in self-denial and tears, furnish a richer enjoyment than all the possessions of the world can confer. In doing good we become "co-workers with God." We co-operate in the plans of the Divine benevolence; and a portion of the blessedness which is allotted to faithful servants enjoyed here, is the happy result. This, the benevolent Redeemer taught his disciples, is at once true blessedness and honour: "Whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? but I am among you as one that serveth." "It shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister." ¹ Compared with the honour of turning one sinner to God, or of spreading the truth and advancing the Redeemer's glory, how mean and contemptible are all the distinctions of rank among men—all the accomplishments of the gay, all the applause of the learned, or of the powerful!

5. We only mention farther, that no exertions, made in a right spirit, for the advancement of God's glory, and the benefit of fellow-men, however feeble, ever fail to *yield some precious fruits*. The Divine assurance, when diligence is enjoined, is, "*Your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*" "*Ye shall reap in due time, if ye faint not.*" God owns the work of faith and labour of love of his servants, and He is not unfaithful to forget them. The man of a public spirit, who lives not to himself, enjoys a present reward in his own bosom, and blessings from on high often distinguish his lot. The promises contained in the forty-first and the hundred and twelfth psalms, are fulfilled to him and his seed after him. By "liberal things" he stands. What he gives to the poor is regarded as "lent to the Lord," and it shall be repaid to him afterwards in double and treble measure.

In the field of benevolent exertion we sow in hope; and though we cannot expect to reap so soon as we have sown, we may certainly calculate upon the promised harvest. The "day of small things" must never be despised; and we must, like the husbandman, have patience in waiting for the return. But

¹ Luke xxii. 27; Matt. xx. 26.

it will assuredly come, and though a different hand may reap from that which sowed, yet the promise is, that "they that sow and they that reap shall rejoice together." Men of a public spirit who engage actively in God's work, receive precious fruit in various ways. The objects of benevolence whom they have aided or relieved, as with Job, rise up and bless them. Evils that had long existed are lessened or banished. Works are set on foot, for the revival of the Church and the benefit of the world, which go forward scattering blessings around them, and attracting around them an increasing holy instrumentality; and prospects of extended usefulness are opened up, which gladden the heart.¹ God usually owns the works of men that have a mind to work, that cherish the spirit of devotedness, and that co-operate in his plans of benevolence. Their designs are accepted, and their labours are blessed, when those of greater mental power and more extensive worldly influence prove abortive, and yield no valuable fruits. The consciousness of having done something in one's day to benefit the Church, and to leave the world better than we found it, is a great reward. The works of God's faithful servants follow them, when they die in the Lord. They furnish the evidence of their acceptance—they shall be honourably mentioned in the judgment—and they are the measure of their future glorious reward. How exalted the sentence of final approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" How bright the glory, and ennobling the honour, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever!"²

¹ "Perhaps every proposal that may be made will be like a stone falling into a pool: one circle and service will produce another, till they extend, who can tell how far? Those who devote themselves to good devices, and who duly observe their opportunities to do good, usually find a wonderful increase of their opportunities. The gracious providence of God affords this recompense to his diligent servants. He will multiply their opportunities of being serviceable; and when ingenious men have used themselves to a little contrivance in pursuing the best intentions, their ingenuity will sensibly improve, and there will be more expansion in their diffusive applications. Among all the dispensations of a special Providence in the government of the world, none is less interrupted than the accomplishment of that word, 'Unto him that hath shall be given.' I will say this, O useful man! take this for thy motto, '*Hubenti dabitur*'—to him that hath shall be given—and in a lively use of thy opportunities to do good, see how remarkably it will be accomplished. See what accomplishment of that word will at last surprise thee, 'Though thy beginning be small, yet thy latter end shall greatly increase.'"—Cotton Mather's *Essays to do Good*, pp. 52, 53.

² Daniel xii. 3.

2. WAY OF CULTIVATING AND DISPLAYING A PUBLIC SPIRIT.

We offer a few *plain hints* concerning the cultivation and manifestation of a public spirit. The young are in danger not only of neglecting the proper season, but of wasting the energies of their minds in idle wishes or abortive plans, and of losing their pains by desultory efforts.

1. To cherish a public spirit, and be instrumental in doing good, the young should betimes consider seriously *their talents and opportunities*, and what work may be specially required of them, and they should thoroughly betake themselves to its performance. They should dread lest they be found loiterers or slothful. They should aim to do good. They should frequently ponder the inquiry, "What is there that I may do for the service of the glorious Lord, and for the welfare of those for whom I ought to be concerned?"¹ In general, it will be found that where such a spirit of inquiry is entertained, and when such opportunities and circumstances are duly considered, the person will either be directed into a new path of benevolence, untrodden by others, or will be instrumental in effecting something which others have not accomplished.

2. *Be fertile in expedients to do good, and always ready for any work which may be presented.* Consider your time and opportunities, the numerous claims of Christ's cause, and of those whom you may benefit. There is work enough for all, and for each. The Divine direction is, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."² We must sow plentifully if we would reap plentifully. Should we be disappointed of fruit in one work, let us betake ourselves to another; and what our hand finds to do, let us do it with alacrity, and do it with our might. In general, opportunities will not be wanting to men of a public spirit. We must never excuse ourselves from engaging in a good work on the ground that it is not the piece of service which we could have wished. Our rule is, when God calls, and his cause demands our service, to say with all readiness, "Lord, here am I, send me."

Our Lord's beautiful illustration applies here.³ He here impressively teaches that our Divine Master has for his servants, and for the same servants, different pieces of work—in the field, in the house, in personal attendance upon Himself; and

¹ Mather's *Essays to do Good*, p. 51. ² Eccles. xi. 6. ³ Luke xvii. 7-10

that their duty is to hold themselves always ready for any service to which He calls, and to do it in the lowliest self-denial ; and that they are to expect the full reward only when their work shall have been completed.

3. A principal feature of a right public spirit is *genuine and unaffected humility*. If we would do good, we must be willing to take the lowest place in the work of benevolence. We will rejoice in the benevolent exertions of others ; in the work itself, and not in the applause and fame of it, we will seek pleasure ; and, like the forerunner of our Lord, we will say, with gladness of heart, when we see our Master's cause advancing, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*"¹ The holy angels who are constantly employed in executing their Lord's pleasure, make no mention of their works. They veil their faces and cover their feet, while, with expanded wing, they hasten to perform the Divine commandments. How much greater reason have we, who mingle impurity with our best services, to make no mention of our works, to claim no honour on account of them, and to confess, when we have done all, "*We are unprofitable servants : we have done that which it was our duty to do !*"²

4. Finally. Those who would receive the reward of the faithful servant, must not shrink from *danger*, or be discouraged by *difficulty* ; and they must *resolutely persevere to the end*. It is the observation of John Newton, that hardly any work has been begun, which is calculated to be of use in the world, but the enemy has thrown difficulties in the way of its execution. Trials and impediments are to be expected whenever we set about any work that tends to advance God's glory, or to benefit fellow-men. Yet we must never hold back, or give over, because of these. They are oftentimes permitted to test our spirit ; and if we relinquish our work because of difficulties, it will be the sad evidence that our heart was not in it. We must never weary in well-doing. "He that endures to the end shall be saved." The warrior is not crowned till the battle is fought and the victory is achieved. Rest is for the faithful servant only after finished labour. You must aim to hold on the way of diligent persevering exertion, to gird the loins anew for sustained labour, and to anticipate the prize only when the battle is fought and the course finished.³ Study to *do much in a short time*. You may be called away from all earthly labour in youth, and may have to tenant an early grave. You will do

¹ John iii. 30.

² Luke xvii. 10.

³ When the late William Ladd, after labouring several years with little apparent success, complained in desponding tones of the obstacles that

well to remember habitually, that when your days are numbered, the estimate of your character will not be taken so much from *the time you have lived*, as from *the works which you have done*. To have lived and laboured for Christ, to have served our generation by the will of God, is a cheering retrospect for a dying bed, and often supplies bright hopes for eternity.

The Apostle Paul presents an eminent instance of public spirit in the days of primitive Christianity. A fire of purest flame—the love of benevolence—glowed with intense ardour in his bosom, and urged him forward in his glorious career. He laboured more abundantly than all his fellows. He triumphed over the greatest obstacles. Forgetting things behind, and reaching to the things before, he “pressed to the mark of the prize of his high calling,” and rested not till, his course finished, he grasped the glorious crown, and obtained the object of his fervent aspirations—“an exceeding great, even an eternal weight of glory.” The history of the Apostle of the Gentiles, from his conversion, is throughout the record of an instance of the loftiest and most heroic benevolence, and of its blessed fruits, both to himself, and to countless thousands who have shared in them in past ages, and who will yet share in them, till the end of time.¹

Reformers, martyrs of Christ, distinguished ministers and missionaries, and Christian philanthropists, supply, likewise, impressive examples of public spirit and of benevolent exertion, which the young will do well to study carefully, and to transcribe in their conduct. The world has been greatly more indebted to Christian men, in different stations of life, who have given themselves to do good, than to the most admired philosophers and poets, the most distinguished warriors and statesmen, and the most illustrious sons of science. The names of Luther and Calvin and Knox, of Cargill and Renwick, of Whitfield and Brainerd, of Wilberforce and Howard and Chalmers, will be held in deserved and lasting honour, when those of famed legislators and renowned scholars shall have perished; and the works which they originated, or carried on, will remain, multiplying blessings to the world to distant ages. Let the young follow them, who through faith and patience now inherit

arrested his progress, Dr Payson said to him, “Brother Ladd, do something every day.” These words were thenceforth his motto. He did something every day, and ultimately prospered.

¹ Justly has it been said, that “Europe owes more to the Apostle Paul than to all the kings and emperors that have ever lived in it.”

the promises. Let them display the public spirit, and emulate the devoted benevolence, of such honoured servants of God. Thus will their characters be ennobled, their works will be owned and honoured; and while they themselves shall enjoy a bright reward here and hereafter, they will be acknowledged as instruments of blessing to many others in their own day, and after they have rested from their labours.

SECT. III.—*Christian Missions.*

Although the subject of Christian Missions comes under the head of benevolent effort, which has been illustrated in the last section, yet, because of its great importance to the youth of the Church, we have deemed it better to devote to it a separate consideration. The present day has been justly termed "*the era of missions*," when the various sections of the Church, awaking from a long slumber, have looked with sorrow and compassion upon the miseries of perishing men, and have recognized the great duty of sending them the Gospel, which alone can effectually relieve them.

It is true that the vast proportion of the world's population is yet immersed in the darkness and degradation of Pagan idolatry; that Christianity, even in lands where it is professed, is greatly corrupted by the superstitions of Popery and other evil systems; and that the descendants of Israel yet "abide without a king, and without a sacrifice, and without an ephod, and teraphim," ignorant of their own Messiah, and opposed to the only way of salvation.

Yet it is matter of holy gratulation that this state of moral degradation is seen and lamented by an increasing number of devoted men throughout the churches; and that an undertaking has been commenced, which aims to banish idolatry and error and oppression from the world, and which is destined to go forward till it ushers in the blissful universal reign of Messiah the Prince, and till righteousness and praise shall spring forth before all nations.

The universal diffusion of Christianity may properly be affirmed to be the *great duty and privilege* of the Christian Church. There are indeed other duties to which she is called by her high vocation, such as being the depository of Divine truth, the preservation of a pure order and discipline, and training her children for the work and enjoyments of the Upper Sanctuary. But still the universal establishment of the

dominion of her exalted Head in the world is her special and eminent duty, the performance of which is essential to the proper discharge of all her other duties, and is inseparable from the participation of her most desirable privileges. The Jewish Church was, in its nature and design, of limited extent and temporary duration. The Mosaic economy, under which it was constituted, was intended to be a wall of circumvallation and separation, to preserve the Church from surrounding idolatry and corruption, until "the Desire of all nations" should come to his holy temple; and till He who was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the salvation of his people Israel, should arise as the Sun of Righteousness, having salvation under his wings. When the Saviour came in human nature, the shadows disappeared at the manifestation of the glorious Substance. "The middle wall of partition" was broken down. The Jewish ritual having served its purpose, gave place to an enlarged and more spiritual economy, one prominent feature of which is, that it embraces the whole family of man, and offers a full and unfettered salvation to the people of every kindred and tongue. Under this, the concluding dispensation, the joyful predictions of Jewish seers were to meet their full accomplishment. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

The Christian Church is constituted, by her Divine Head, the instrument of accomplishing the Divine purpose of her own enlargement; and just in proportion as she exhibits this character, and labours in this important vocation, will she herself enjoy the blessing from above, and be a blessing to the world. Like the *leaven* "hid in three measures of meal," and acting on

¹ Isaiah xi. 9; xl. 5; ii. 2-4.

the surrounding mass till "all is leavened," so this sacred Institution is designed to influence surrounding society, to leaven individuals, communities, and civil and ecclesiastical systems, till all shall come into willing subjection to Christ the Lord. Small and insignificant at first as the grain of mustard seed, it is yet under the law of perpetual growth and increase, and shall one day become a great tree, the men of every nation and clime coming with desire and joy to lodge under its branches. The truths which the Church is to confess, and her living members, are, for a long time, as "a handful of corn" upon mountain-tops—few, thin, and apparently blighted—but these grains shall hereafter grow, and shake with prosperous fruit, "like Lebanon." "They that come of Jacob shall take root: Israel shall bud and blossom, and fill the face of the world with fruit."¹ The command of Zion's King enjoins upon the Church the great duty of self-extension, and is accompanied with the gracious assurance of universal triumph and prosperity. "Enlarge the place of thy tent; let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitation; spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."²

If the truth is to be universally diffused, and the kingdom of Christ to be established throughout all the earth, by the instrumentality of the Church, then it is evident that all her members should regard themselves called to this great work. Here is employment for all, and for every individual. Not upon ministers alone—the accredited heralds of the Cross—devolves the duty of making known God's light and saving health throughout the nations. All that claim to be denizens of Zion, or that expect to enjoy her privileges, should regard themselves as especially enlisted in this service, and should cheerfully devote themselves, and all that they have, to its performance. The work is so vast, and the glory that will redound to the Redeemer so great, and the blessings that will accrue to the world from its accomplishment are so many and so important, that it demands all consecrated and sustained energies, all disposable means, and, above all, the heart prayerfully and in faith resting in this labour, as a source of the highest satisfaction and delight.

It was the display of this spirit and character that so eminently distinguished the days of primitive Christianity.

¹ Psalm lxxii. 16; Isaiah xxvii. 6.

² Isaiah liv. 2, 3.

The flame of missionary zeal then burned with intense fervour upon the altar. Apostles, ministers, people, were all under a holy impulse of the Spirit to communicate, as widely as possible, the tidings of redeeming love. To be a Christian then was to be a public servant of Christ, called and devoted to make known his renowned fame to all nations. Not only were all the primitive disciples "of one heart and one mind," striving together for the faith of the Gospel, but all were animated with the same spirit of holy zeal, to push forward the standard of their Prince, and to bring all into subjection to his powerful sceptre. The effects that flowed from this devoted spirit, and from the self-denied labours of the primitive Church, were most striking and salutary. In less than *forty years* after the Divine Founder of Christianity had ascended to the throne of his glory, the heralds of the Cross had carried the tidings of salvation to the utmost bounds of the Roman empire, which then included the greater part of the known world; and it could be literally said of the preachers of the Word, "Their line is gone through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."¹ The success of the Gospel at that joyful era was connected with the spirit of lively zeal and holy devotedness, not less than with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. What wonders would have been accomplished for the evangelization of the world if this spirit had continued in the Church! What might even now be accomplished were it again restored!

The baptized youth of the Church have a peculiar call to engage with holy alacrity and activity in the propagation of the glorious Gospel. To it they owe all their distinction and privileges. They have come under vows to live to Christ, and to labour for the advancement of his glory. It is their singular privilege to be born in a day when missions to the Jews and Gentiles are in operation in almost all sections of the Church, and when the missionary undertaking embraces the whole habitable globe in the grasp of an expansive benevolence. Their station in the Church, at such a period, involves a solemn and very weighty responsibility. To spread the light of Divine truth throughout regions of moral darkness, and to add new crowns to the many which encircle the Redeemer's head; this is surely the greatest work on earth, worthy to occupy our loftiest thoughts and aspirations, and to engage our constant energies.

The missionary enterprise is admirably fitted to enlist the prayers and exertions of the young. There is something

¹ Psalm xix. 4.

elevated and ennobling, in the highest degree, in bringing the world into subjection to Messiah the Prince. The buoyancy, activity, and warm feelings of youth can find full scope here; and the work is such that we cannot engage in it without being morally, intellectually, and spiritually benefited by it. The liberal soul *shall be made fat*. In watering others, we are ourselves watered. While seeking and labouring for the conversion of the world, we become co-workers with God, and take part in accomplishing the glorious design which occupied the counsels of the Godhead from eternity; and the fulfilment of which will bless the nations, and will yet bring countless multitudes to inherit the blessedness of heaven.

In a day like the present, when the duty of spreading the Gospel is universally admitted, and when new and unexpected opportunities are continually offered, the youth of the Church cannot refuse to take a part in the missionary enterprise, without aggravated criminality. 'This were to belie the profession of being servants of Christ; it is to falsify the avowal of loving Him supremely; and while the great work will go forward, even should the members of the Church withhold more than is meet, they will be regarded as a drag upon the mighty movement, and the kingdom will be given to others that are worthy. The young must learn to esteem it their highest honour to be connected with the missionary undertaking. They must early begin to take a deep interest in the work. What cause on earth is so fitted to interest the young? They must give to its promotion their time—the first and most active of their days; they should consecrate to it their money, and bestow on it their most strenuous exertions; and in whatever department of the missionary field they may be called to labour, they should enter upon it with cordial affection and entire devotedness.

Fully persuaded that engagement in the missionary undertaking is conducive to the best interests of the youth of the Church, and that it is the great work to which the Lord is specially inviting them, we shall briefly notice their OBLIGATIONS to yield themselves to it; and then we shall advert to some *modes of exertion* which appear to us necessary to give to the work of Christian missions increased efficiency and prosperity.

1. Without referring to the predictions of ancient seers concerning the future universal establishment of Messiah's kingdom, and the preparatory instrumentality which the Church was to employ for their accomplishment, we have, in the opening of the Christian economy, the plainest directions on the

subject ; and *the duty of the followers of Christ to disseminate the Gospel to its widest extent, is enforced in the most positive and forcible terms, and under sanctions the most solemn and affecting.* Our Lord's parting command, when He had finished his great work upon earth, and was on the eve of ascending to his mediatorial throne, "GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD ; PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE," declares the propagation of the truth of Christ to be the all-important mission of the Church to a perishing world. It is evident that this precept was designed to be of universal and perpetual obligation. Not to the apostles personally was it alone addressed, for they could not themselves go forth into all the world ; and the promise of the Redeemer's gracious presence in their work till the end of time, could not, in the nature of the case, pertain to them exclusively. Nor was the injunction only laid upon the proper legitimate successors of the apostles—the ministers of the Word—for the message was to be delivered to "every creature," in every part of the earth, and to the end of time. The command rests, in all the plenitude of its obligation, upon the Church in all lands, and in all circumstances, upon all its ministers, and upon all its members, for all should spread abroad the savour of Christ's name, and every man should say to his neighbour, "Know the Lord." This is a principal design of the institution of a church upon the earth ; this is the great work of its ministry, and a paramount and indispensable duty of its membership. Just in proportion as the duty is recognized, and the work faithfully performed, may the fulfilment of the blessed promise be expected, "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*" The Redeemer's gracious presence with his servants, and in the assemblies of his people, his power in holy ordinances, and a special blessing upon the Church's ministrations, are inseparably connected with the work of propagating the Gospel throughout the earth.

That this was the will of the Divine Founder of Christianity, and that upon the progress of this blessed work his heart was intensely set, is farther evident from the terms in which He addressed the assembled disciples in another of the last interviews which He had with them on earth. He "opened their understandings;" and as He let in a supernatural light into their minds, and told them of his sufferings and consequent glory, He intimated his will, "*That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem ;*" and He immediately subjoined the pro-

mise of the Spirit to endue his servants with all fitness for the arduous undertaking.¹ It is thus completely obvious that the blessed Author of our holy religion designed its universal dissemination; that He constituted his professed disciples, in all ages, his instruments for accomplishing this benign purpose; and that the charter of their highest and most endeared privileges was issued in connection with the faithful performance of the work which He had assigned them. To neglect the work of Christian Missions, therefore, is to rebel against the authority of the ascended Redeemer; it is practical disobedience to one of the plainest and most weighty of his commands, and it involves a forfeiture of the most excellent privilege which either the individual Christian or the Church can enjoy — the Saviour's special gracious presence.

2. There can be no doubt that the *primitive Christians understood our Lord's command and commission, in the sense that all were bound to diffuse his truth as widely as possible*, and to make known his saving health throughout the nations. The apostles waited at Jerusalem, according to our Lord's directions, for the promise of the Father. So soon as they received "power from on high," and the Spirit descended at Pentecost, like a rushing mighty wind, they opened their commission, and began to preach everywhere that men should repent. The *manner* of the Spirit's first glorious effusion indicated the character of the work in which Christ's honoured servants were to be occupied. "Cloven tongues" as of fire rested upon each of them, and they were endued with the miraculous gift of tongues. They were thus at once qualified for being missionaries of the Cross to men of every kindred, and people, and tongue; and the most difficult part of their training was immediately surmounted. The Spirit's powerful effusion then, as it has at every subsequent period in which it has been experienced, impelled the servants of God to care for perishing souls, and to labour for the extension of Christ's kingdom. And when the fervent zeal of the primitive Christians was in danger of decay, when the first overpowering impulse of the Pentecostal visitation had subsided, persecution was permitted to scatter them. Thus were they awakened to a thorough sense of their duty to go as evangelists to men of every country and clime. Upon the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word."² The Divine appointment of the first Gentile mission,

¹ Luke xxiv. 45-49.

² Acts viii. 4.

the call addressed to the Apostle Paul to come to Macedonia, to seek the evangelization of Europe, and even the persecutions of the same eminent servant of God, contributed to the enlarged spread of the truth. The Gentile churches everywhere were actuated by the fervid zeal of missionaries of Christ; they regarded the command of their Founder and Head as imperative and paramount; and they considered the grand design of their constitution to be the propagation of the news of salvation in the regions of surrounding darkness. From them "sounded out the Word of the Lord" to all the regions round about. They "held forth the Word of life." They shone as "lights in the world;" and their unwavering aim, which they pursued with steadfast resolution, was to make known to all men the light of the Redeemer's glory. Would we display the character of the primitive Church, and share in their eminent privileges? would we give evidence that we have been baptized with the Spirit from on high? Then we must exemplify the temper and conduct of those who, receiving the first copious showers of Divine influence, accounted it their great work, and their highest honour, to make known God's salvation throughout all nations.

3. The *state of the world* at present, together with *their own high privileges*, should impel Christians of every class to embark in this enterprize of mercy. The moral condition of the world, as it presents itself to the eye of the Christian philanthropist, is that of a vast wilderness; and his work is to open streams of fertility in the desert. The world is one great *Lazarhouse*, and his office is to bring into it the Great Physician, and to apply the *balm* that heals every moral malady. It is a widespread charnel-house, and death in all shapes and in the most loathsome forms is there. The Christian's mission is to go, like the Hebrew seer, into the valley of vision, and to preach to "the dry bones," that they may hear the Word of the Lord, and to call down the Almighty Spirit, that they may be quickened. The world's population still presents to the afflicted eye of the Christian the sad spectacle of millions upon millions of the human family, sitting in the region and shadow of death, under the dark and cruel dominion of the god of this world. There are more than *eight hundred millions* of Pagans, *six or eight millions* of Jews, *one hundred and thirty millions* of Mahometans, *one hundred and twenty millions* of Romish idolaters; and, besides, there are vast multitudes of the corrupt Eastern churches, and of mere nominal Christians, where the clear light of the

* Thess. i. 8; Phil. ii. 16.

Gospel shines. This is the territory into which the Christian soldier is to go, and achieve conquests for the Captain of salvation; this the mighty host against which the armies of Christ are to go forth, conquering and to conquer, until all opposing power shall be broken to pieces, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

In another aspect, the present state of the nations invites and encourages to Christian effort. Long-established systems of idolatry have lost their power over the minds of men. Everything is in a process of transition throughout the nations. The days of superstition and idolatry are numbered, and the time is rapidly approaching when the idols shall be utterly abolished. The moral condition and wants of distant countries are every year becoming better known. Rapid methods of communication have brought remote nations into closer contact, and are preparing a highway for the spread of the Gospel. International interests have connected different and formerly hostile tribes as one family. The moral Governor of the universe has been transferring the sovereignty of large portions of the Pagan world to Protestant powers, as if to point out, in the most distinct and emphatic manner, the duty of those, who have the pure light of revelation, to diffuse it universally. Everywhere the field for evangelistic exertion is opening more widely year after year; and God is continually pressing upon the Church the great duty of rising to claim possession of the utmost parts of the earth as her Lord's covenanted inheritance.

Contemporaneous with these important changes *without*, a great change has been progressing *within* the Church—a movement which fairly indicates that her great work is the conversion of the world. This important undertaking has taken possession of all minds. The claims of the missionary enterprise have now been recognized by almost all sections of the visible Church. The desire of extension and enlargement has been universally felt. Truth has been separating from error; and the opposing powers of light and darkness are standing in arrayed hostility, meditating new conquests, or prepared for a final conflict. Antichrist is pouring forth the missionaries of idolatry and debasing superstition into all lands, as if about speedily to realize its long-indulged dream of universal dominion. These efforts of the enemy have aroused the dormant energies of the friends of truth; and the visitation of the Spirit from on high has quickened them, as the wants and miseries of a perishing

world have been brought to light, to make vigorous and unwonted attempts for their relief. In all departments of Christian society, the work of Christian Missions—at home and abroad, among Jew and Gentile—is the absorbing theme of contemplation, conversation, planning, and action. It is heard from the pulpit, is proclaimed from the platform; females in their retirement are working for its advancement, and young men are taught to dedicate to it the prime of their days. It enters as an essential element into the training of the candidates for the ministry; it has taken possession of no inconsiderable part of the literature of the age, and some of the noblest efforts of the Christian press are devoted to the cause of the world's evangelization. What does all this indicate? Does it not clearly declare the purpose of Him who rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, that the Gospel of the kingdom should be preached to all nations? Does it not admonish the Church of its high responsibility, and stir her up to the great duty of proclaiming God's salvation throughout the world?

4. We only add, that *the spiritual benefits* which shall accrue to ourselves and others from evangelistic efforts furnish a powerful motive and encouragement to engage in them. In all ages, those have been eminently blessed who have devoted themselves to the work of advancing Christ's kingdom in the earth. The Church has been increased and prospered when labouring to extend the blessings of Christianity to the destitute and perishing—the votaries of superstition and idolatry. The most honoured servants of God have been missionaries of the Cross, who were willing to spend and be spent, in gathering souls to Christ. Such were the Apostle of the Gentiles and his fellows in the days of primitive Christianity; and Elliot and Brainerd, and Swartz and Martyn, and Carey and Morrison, and Williams of modern missionaries. Revival in the Church has sometimes preceded, and perhaps more frequently been the fruit of prayerful exertions for the diffusion of Christianity. Ministers have become more faithful and devoted pastors, by lending themselves to advance the missionary cause. People have been awakened to a deeper sense of the worth of their own souls, and of the value of the great things of salvation; and the contributions which they have tendered for the spread of the Gospel have, instead of diminishing their means, actually served to increase them; and have, besides, nurtured in themselves a liberal spirit, which is true riches. The congregations that have done most for the

propagation of the Gospel have been thereby prospered and blessed. They have experienced that it is "more blessed to give than to receive." Imparting to others, they have been themselves built up and increased. The dews of heaven have descended upon them in copious abundance. Contentions have ceased; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they have been multiplied. The reason why spiritual blessings have thus been enjoyed as the fruit of missionary effort is evident. Those who make them in a right spirit manifest conformity to a principal feature of the character of Christ, who went about doing good. They obey a leading direction of his blessed will. They exhibit a mind like his, who has his highest joy in seeing "the travail of his soul;" and as the excellent reward, they walk in the light of his countenance, and share the honour of being co-workers with Him in the accomplishment of his high designs of mercy.

From such views, the Church, under a sense of singular privileges, and in a day of wonderful events, should recognize her obligations to seek the conversion of the world. She should hear the call of her glorious Head, "*Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is arisen upon thee.*"¹ The youth of the Church, especially, should regard it as their highest privilege to dedicate themselves to the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth. No work in which they can be engaged is more important; there is none in which they will be more highly honoured. Let them consecrate to it their youthful energies, and they will assuredly reap a present reward, and hereafter enjoy the unspeakable distinction of being owned as instruments of bringing all kindreds and people into subjection to the Lord's Anointed.

To the young who recognize it as their duty to aid the cause of Christian Missions, we suggest a few hints which may tend to the advancement of this important undertaking.

Much as is spoken or written on the subject of the world's conversion, it is always to be remembered, that exertions of this kind are only in their infancy, and that the Church has yet to learn much, both in relation to the principle and practice of evangelizing the nations. Very few of the associations engaged in missionary labours have yet celebrated their first jubilee, and by far the largest number date their origin at a much later period. What has been attempted we regard as valuable; not as by any means exemplifying, on the part of the Church,

¹ Isaiah lx. 1.

either a due sense of the magnitude of the work, or of its obligations to prosecute it, or a proper consecration of the resources of the Church to accomplish it; but as a hopeful commencement, betokening greatly enlarged exertions in future. If we would embark in this undertaking, from a proper regard to the command of Christ, under a right feeling of our solemn responsibility, or with any reasonable prospect of the desired success, we must aim to create a new era in the history of the missionary enterprise; we must give a new impulse to the work, and bring to it vastly increased means; we must diligently and constantly labour to cause "righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations."

Among those things which appear to us indispensable to sustain and carry forward enlarged missionary efforts, we notice—

1. *More fervent prayer—individual and united—for the conversion of the world.* When our blessed Lord taught his disciples to pray, and gave them an inspired model, to which all their prayers are to be conformed, He placed among the first of the petitions which it contains the request, "*Thy kingdom come.*" He has impressively taught us, that the conversion of the world should occupy a principal place in all our prayers; that it should be sought above any blessings that we ask for ourselves, and that the fulfilment of this petition should be a matter of daily concern. The Saviour himself, as our exalted Advocate in glory, makes continual intercession on this subject. "For Zion's sake," He declares, speaking with interest and delight in this work, "will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."¹ The imitation of his blessed example He has made obligatory upon all his faithful followers. Verses 6, 7— "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

Those who profess Christ's name are constituted "the Lord's remembrancers." They are to put Him in mind of his covenant-engagement, plead his promises, and cease not to wrestle importunately in prayer, until Zion's enemies are brought down, and Jerusalem becomes the joy of the whole earth. The emphatic command, contained in the second

¹ Isaiah lxii. 1.

psalm, is of the same import, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."¹ And of similar purport, too, is the prediction in the seventy-second psalm, verse 15, "Prayer also shall be made for Him continually, and daily shall He be praised." These declarations evidently imply that the Church is to ask earnestly, and importunately supplicate for the conversion of the nations. In connection with the faithful performance of this duty, the Divine guarantee is given, that the heathen shall be converted, the uttermost parts of the earth become the Redeemer's inheritance, and that his praise shall be celebrated in all nations.

It may be added, that wherever eminent success has attended evangelical efforts, there has been this spirit of fervent persevering prayer. So was it in the apostolic times, and at the period of the Reformation; and the most honoured of modern missionaries, such as Swartz and Brainerd, have prevailed for the conversion of the heathen more by their earnest pleadings than by all their other labours. As the revival in "the valley of vision" immediately followed the prophet's earnest call to the Spirit to come from the four winds, and not his preaching to "the dry bones," so the Church will be revived, Israel gathered in, and the heathen converted, when the spirit of importunate supplication shall universally pervade the Church.

There is the highest reason why all other instrumentality should be proved to be useless without prayer; why the blessing should be withheld till the Church is stirred to mighty wrestlings for the conversion of Jew and Gentile. God will not give his glory to another. Prayer is the expression of faith putting the work into the hands of Omnipotence, and confiding in Him to accomplish it. When Christians are excited to plead earnestly, and to give the Lord no rest, they "move the Hand that moves the heavens." In answer to the Church's supplications, the Spirit shall yet be poured out like the flood upon the dry ground. "The wilderness and solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

Have we not reason to fear, that in many modern missionary efforts there has been undue reliance upon other means to the neglect of prayer? Do not the fewness and coldness of the Church's prayers for the evangelization of the world, give

¹ Psalm ii. 8.

sad indication that we are not yet awakened to a proper sense of the importance of the missionary undertaking? It should ever be remembered, that as exertions without prayer are *infidelity*, so prayer without corresponding efforts is *hypocrisy*. Let the young set themselves to remedy this evil. Let them learn to plead, and to engage others to pray much for the coming of Christ's kingdom. Let them give to this matter the position which the Hearer of prayer designed that it should occupy; let them place it at the head of all their supplications, and let all their efforts be prayerful. The fire of consecrated zeal enkindled at the mercy-seat will propel them to holy and sustained activity. God will accept and bless prayerful exertions; and those who become the Lord's remembrancers will be acknowledged as the instruments of establishing and rendering Jerusalem "a praise in the earth."¹

2. *A more devoted spirit in the Church* is essential to the advancement of the missionary cause. We must regard the Redeemer's glory as the great end in all things. Christians must learn to live not to themselves, and to be willing to spend and be spent for the establishment of Christ's kingdom. They must practise habitually lessons of self-denial; and regarding the world as made by Christ, and for Christ, they must consider their work in the world as that of bringing back a revolted province to subjection to its rightful Lord. Low worldly aims and ends must be discarded. We must overcome the world by faith, and be crucified to it by the power of the Cross. Thus shall we be prepared to estimate aright the wretchedness of the world without the Gospel, and to feel the weight of our obligations to labour continually for its amelioration. Devotedness in ministers and candidates for the ministry would impel them to go forth as labourers, to gather in the spiritual harvest. A similar spirit prevailing among the members of the Church would lead them to devise "liberal things," to pray with all earnestness for the conversion of sinners, and cheerfully to contribute all in their power for the accomplishment of an end so important and glorious. The young are the most suitable instruments for exciting and increasing such a spirit throughout the Church. Self-denial manifested by them in relinquishing

¹ An excellent means of promoting a right missionary spirit, and of bringing down a blessing upon missionary efforts, would be to have a *concert of united prayer* among the young, which might be observed *weekly*, or at least *once a month*. This has been found a happy method of advancing the cause of Missions in America and elsewhere.

the world's allurements, and in devoting such worldly things as they possess to the advancement of Christ's cause, will have a salutary effect upon others. The fervour of youth will give vigour to benevolent undertakings, and the example of baptized youth, acting in the spirit of their baptismal engagement, as soldiers following the Captain of their salvation, as He goes forth conquering and to conquer, will animate older members of the Church to embark with new life in missionary work, and to prosecute it with resolute perseverance. The young have it certainly in their power either to give a new and powerful impulse to the missionary cause by their devotedness, or to impede it by lukewarmness and indifference. Oh ! let them consider that the Church greatly needs to be excited to redoubled exertions in this cause, that a rich blessing will be the fruit of their consecrated zeal, and that a blight and curse must follow the want of it. Let them gird up their loins for their work. Let them stand forth before the Church and the world, as single-hearted and devoted servants, to perform it. Thus will they influence others to take part in the sacred enterprize. Christ's cause will be greatly advanced, and many may be brought to say of them, as in a day of revival, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."¹

3. *Enlarged liberality in the Church* is required for the prosperity of the missionary undertaking. The offerings of Christian benevolence must be on a scale commensurate to the magnitude of the undertaking. The power of Christian love expands the heart, and genuine zeal for the propagation of the Gospel will root out of it the love of the world, and will lead Christians to regard it as a high privilege to dedicate their substance to the establishment of Christ's kingdom. When the tabernacle was to be erected in the wilderness, the offerings for this purpose were so readily furnished, and so abundant, that proclamation had to be made that the gifts should be stayed. Afterwards, when David had made preparation for "building a house to the Lord, exceeding magnificent," the princes and people presented freely the offerings of a liberal benevolence, and gladdening the heart of the aged monarch, so that, under the power of a singular effusion of the Spirit, he exclaimed, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."² The introduction of the Christian dispensation was distinguished by eminent liberality.

¹ Zechariah viii. 23.

² 1 Chronicles xxix. 14.

When the Spirit was plentifully poured out at Pentecost, one of the happy fruits was, that the converts willingly parted with their goods, and regarded their worldly substance as given them only for supplying the wants of the poor, and for the furtherance of the Gospel. Indeed, at all times in which true religion has flourished, and the cause of the truth has advanced, a spirit of enlarged liberality has characterized those who have been honoured as approved instruments in this good work.

In our own day, although large sums have been contributed to the treasury of Christian benevolence, yet the Church has much to learn on this subject. In the great majority of cases, the offerings of Christians for the spread of the Gospel have been irregular, fitful, given under the impulse of some temporary excitement, and bearing no proportion either to their own weighty obligations or to the wants of a perishing world. The consequence has been, that the cause of Missions has been feebly sustained; the most favourable opportunities have been neglected; and, through the love of worldly things, the Church has incurred the curse of Meroz, in not coming forth to the help of the Lord against the mighty. New principles must be adopted and acted upon, in relation to the pecuniary support of schemes of benevolence, if we would see the earth's darkness dispelled, and the cause of Christ triumphant. The members of the Church must be brought to regard it as not *optional*, but as a sacred *duty and privilege*, to contribute freely for the spread of the Gospel. Contributions must be furnished with systematic punctuality, according as God has prospered, and so as to afford evidence that they are the fruits of grace powerfully working in the heart—the *sacrifices* of faith and love. Indeed, much, very much will depend upon the pecuniary means that are furnished for the diffusion of Christianity being *systematic* and *liberal*. It would not be difficult, we think, to show that the rule which the youthful patriarch Jacob proposed to himself, when he vowed at Bethel, was founded in moral principles, and might still be adopted by Christians: "Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth to thee."¹ The tenth part of all a person's income, devoted to the spread of the Gospel, would be a suitable return of gratitude to Him to whom we are indebted for all that we possess. There are many cases in which so much might be readily given; and if devoted to God in a proper spirit, his blessing would rest in double measure upon the remainder. In some instances, this would obviously

¹ Genesis xxviii. 22.

be too small a proportion of property to devote to God ; but as an ordinary rule, if it were generally given, there would be a vast accession to the funds of Christian benevolence. If to this there were added, after the manner of God's ancient people, the "first fruits" of all our industry and possessions, and the young would dedicate their first earnings to the promotion of Christ's cause, the treasury of the Church would be furnished with ample means for the universal diffusion of the Gospel.

The *necessity* of enlarged liberality in the Church for the spread of Christ's cause is manifold and pressing, and motives for exercising it are numerous and weighty. If the heathen are to be converted, the Jews gathered in, and the ignorant and irreligious reclaimed, the Bible must be translated and printed ; missionaries, in large numbers, prepared and sent forth, on the principle of taking nothing of the Gentiles ; and many other appliances of external means are needed—all of which will involve a large and sustained expenditure of money and personal effort. Yet the work brings with it its own, and that a very high reward. One soul converted will infinitely counterbalance all the effort and expense incurred in supplying the means of salvation ; and were the contributions of the Church to be instrumental in plucking a single brand out of the burning, it would be a full remuneration for all that has been cast into the Christian treasury. We have the amplest assurance that such offerings will not be in vain. God's Word cannot return void ; and all past experience justifies the remark, that whenever means have been readily furnished for the evangelization of the world, there has resulted precious fruit in the conversion of sinners to Christ.

The enemies of truth, moreover, freely contribute in a manner to put Christians, who hold the truth, to shame for their niggard parsimony in supporting and propagating Christ's cause. Much more is furnished by Hindoo idolaters, to minister to the pomp and splendour of a festival of some Pagan deity in India, than some of our largest missionary institutions collect in a whole year. The funds that are willingly furnished, and every year increasing, to societies engaged in spreading throughout the earth the abominations of Antichrist, greatly surpass what the various Protestant Churches contribute for the dissemination of the truth as it is in Jesus. A liberal spirit is, besides, *a great blessing to its possessor* ; as withholding more than is meet from Christ's cause never fails to draw after it poverty, in the fullest sense of the term—barrenness and

unfruitfulness of spirit ; and in the end not unfrequently outward poverty.

The Scriptures clearly declare that the time is approaching when a spirit of enlarged liberality shall be poured out upon the Church. The "abundance of the sea" shall be converted to Christ. Men shall "consecrate their gain" to the God of the earth. Princes shall come out of the land of Egypt, and shall "submit themselves with picces of silver." The "nations shall bring their riches and honour to Zion." So soon as this enlarged liberality shall distinguish the Church, she shall break forth on the right hand and on the left, and her seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and cause the desolate heritages to be inhabited. May the young in our day learn to "devise liberal things !" So will they be blessed themselves ; their example will provoke others to spend and be spent for the promotion of the Redeemer's glory, and the missionary enterprise will achieve new triumphs throughout the world. The tide of enlightened zeal and holy benevolence will swell and enlarge, until the most distant lands receive the glad tidings of the Gospel ; and the happy consequence will be, that the idols shall be utterly abolished, and righteousness and peace shall spring forth before all nations.

4. The youth of the Church should seriously consider whether they are not *called to give themselves as agents in the missionary work*. Greatly as we require an increase of pecuniary support, a devoted instrumentality for propagating the Gospel is much more needed. When the Saviour would have the tidings of his mission heralded throughout Judea, He directed his disciples to "pray the Lord of harvest" to send "faithful labourers into his harvest ;" and He added this emphatic reason, "THE LABOURERS ARE FEW."¹ Alas ! that this should still be the melancholy record, in relation to the world's conversion, "*The harvest is great, and the labourers are few.*" Comparing the number of evangelical missionaries that are at present labouring in Pagan lands, with the vast population that is immersed in idolatry, how inadequate the supply ! how disproportionate the means of *moral* amelioration ! One missionary of the Cross to every *million*, or million and a half of heathen, even were the missionaries dispersed throughout all countries in the world, is all that the Church has hitherto sent to proclaim to an enslaved, perishing world, the tidings of salvation ! What are these among so many ? And when it is, moreover, considered, that

¹ Matthew ix. 37.

vast regions, such as Tartary, Affghanistan, Tibet, many parts of the extended empire of China, and by far the larger part of the continent of Africa, have not labouring in them a single herald of the Cross, the destitution of the heathen, and the criminality of the Church in not sending to them the means of salvation, will appear yet more appalling. As in attempting to reduce a fortress of a powerful enemy, it would be regarded as madness to send a soldier to fire a random shot or two against the walls, instead of despatching a well-equipped and sufficient force, so the Church has been similarly culpable in only sending to the heathen a few ill-sustained labourers, instead of a numerous and well-prepared host. No vigorous assaults upon the strongholds of the enemy can be made in this way ; and instead of wondering that the success of missionary exertions has been so limited, the only wonder is that any success whatever should have followed attempts so desultory and inadequate. The Church must betake herself to an entirely different mode of warfare, if she would be instrumental in reducing the nations to subjection to the Lord's Anointed. Her resources must be tasked ; the means of salvation must be liberally supplied to perishing men ; well-trained missionaries, in sufficient numbers, must be sent forth into every country that is under the dominion of the prince of darkness ; and we must never rest satisfied till all lands, and the men of every tribe, shall have been made to hear the joyful sound.

One of the greatest obstacles existing at present within the Church to vigorous exertions for the world's conversion, is the reluctance or refusal of persons who acknowledge the claims of the missionary cause to give themselves to the work. Some magnify unduly the difficulties that retard its accomplishment. A large number of the members of the Church seem to have no proper sense that they are under any obligation to give their personal exertions in this cause ; and some rate the qualifications so high as to shrink back, as if they could do nothing whatever in the matter. It is to be feared that all this proceeds from wrong conceptions of the nature and claims of the missionary enterprise, or from real apathy or unbelief. The first Christians—under the powerful impulse of the Spirit, without outward resources, destitute of many of the qualifications on which so much stress is laid in our day—went forth into all the world, and preached the Gospel to every creature. Their grand qualifications were glowing and supreme love to the Saviour, and deep, heartfelt, absorbing concern for perishing

souls ; and wherever these are still possessed, there will be, in some degree, the desire entertained to be instrumental in collecting jewels for Immanuel's crown. Some of the most distinguished and most successful of modern missionaries, such as Carey, Morrison, Williams, Moffat, &c., have risen from humble stations of life, and enjoyed few advantages of education in boyhood ; and not a few of those who are now in the field, were at home the humble teachers in the Sabbath-school. It is related of the celebrated Socrates, that when, on a certain day, his pupils vied with each other in the presents which they offered as a token of gratitude and respect to their master, and at the last a poor boy said he gave himself, the philosopher declared that he esteemed this present above all the rest. Thus the most costly and valued gift that can be presented on the missionary altar is the devotement of faithful labourers to the work.

The baptized youth of the Church should be trained by parents with such an object in view, and they should readily offer themselves for such a noble service. At least they ought seriously to consider the claims of perishing men as addressed to themselves personally, to consider whether their own duty may not be to dedicate themselves to this good work. God accepts of persons according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. The woman of Samaria who met the Redeemer at Jacob's well, was a successful evangelist to the men of her native place, and so was the cured demoniac of Decapolis. Did the youth of the Church feel, like them, the strength of love to Christ, and the weight of their obligations to the Saviour, they would be prepared to become volunteers in the armies of the Lord of hosts, and might be of incalculable use in calling forth the slumbering energies of the Church, and in promoting the evangelization of the world. It is melancholy, indeed, to consider, that while Christian parents send their children to distant countries—and the young of Christian families shrink not from going even to unhealthy climates for some merely worldly objects—there should be so much fear, or apathy, or reluctance, in consecrating personal efforts to the conversion of the world. Let the young strive to wipe away this reproach from the Church. What have they to fear in yielding themselves to the Lord, to do his work, and to advance his glory ? The natural elements, the influence of climate, the hearts of all men, are in His hand. He can give suitable qualifications ; and He will do it to all who unreservedly devote themselves to Him. His all-gracious promise, " Lo, I

am with you always," is surely sufficient for every want and for every difficulty. Confiding in it, the young should give themselves up to the great enterprise of bringing a rebel world under the dominion of Christ. This undertaking will reflect on themselves unspeakable honour. They will enjoy success in their work, under the blessing of the best of Masters; and hereafter theirs may be the reward of those who turn many to righteousness, and who shall shine as the stars, and as the brightness of the firmament for ever and ever.

Lastly. *The exercise of a missionary spirit at home, in evangelistic exertions to reclaim the wretched and perishing in one's own neighbourhood*, is important as an element of enlarged success in the missionary work. The advancement of the Redeemer's glory, in the conversion of souls, is the great object of missionary exertions; and love to souls—a love by which the heart bleeds and is bowed down, in view of the miserable condition of perishing men, and which intensely desires their spiritual renovation—is the right missionary spirit. Now, surely a human being, under guilt and moral pollution in the circle of our friends or acquaintances, is in as wretched a condition as a Pagan in India or China; and the salvation of a soul in our families, or at our doors, should be esteemed as valuable as the conversion of a soul in some remote part of the world.

We must divest the missionary enterprise of all that is romantic and sentimental, and deal with the solemn realities of the eternal loss and the eternal salvation of souls. Unquestionably, he has no right missionary zeal who, while he talks of the evangelization of the nations, neglects to seek the salvation of his own household, or leaves souls to perish around him, without making any efforts to rescue them from destruction. Genuine love to Christ will impel us to endeavour to bring all with whom we have influence to the Saviour. To pray fervently for the souls of relatives and acquaintances; to devote one's self to efforts for instructing the ignorant and reclaiming the wretched; and to cherish an inextinguishable desire to be instrumental in the conversion of sinners, will supply the best evidence that we are actuated by a right missionary spirit. We will thus *begin at home*, but never think of confining our exertions there. A person thus engaged will embrace the world in the circle of a lofty and expansive benevolence. His exertions on the field of neglected humanity around him will train him for more extended effort. He will be, in the best sense of the phrase, "a missionary of the love of Christ" to

perishing men, and through his labours he may have many recovered souls "for a crown of rejoicing" in the day of the Lord Jesus. Such an humble, devoted, and successful labourer was Harlan Page, the prayerful instrument of promoting revivals in America; and such was the single-hearted, amiable David Nasmith, the originator of town missions. Let the young imitate these examples of Christian philanthropy. Let them, obeying the Saviour's urgent command, go to the streets and broad ways of a thronged population, to gather in the blind, and halt, and lame; let them go again to the highways and hedges, and, with still more urgent importunity, "compel them to come in." They will thus evince a true scriptural zeal for the advancement of the Redeemer's glory; they may be prepared to give themselves for the work of distant missions; and should they remain at home, they may, notwithstanding, be the means of delivering souls from death, and of leading others to devote themselves to the work of Christian benevolence. The Sabbath-school, the evangelization of our native country, and of our own neighbourhood, and revivals in the Church, will furnish ample opportunities of exertion, and supply, at the same time, the best means of training and drawing forth a missionary spirit.

The cause of Christian Missions is, under these views, recommended to the special attention of the youth of the Church. It is not going too far to say, that this is eminently the work of God, that on which his heart was fixed from all eternity, that which led to the most wondrous sacrifice that ever the universe witnessed, and that to which He renders all the movements in the kingdom of providence subservient. This, too, is the present great work of the Church—that to which her exalted Head is loudly summoning all her ministers and members, the neglect of which will be followed by sure tokens of his displeasure; while its *performance* will result in countless blessings to the Church, and to the whole family of mankind.

The baptized youth of the Church—her youthful members—should account it their greatest honour and privilege to have a part in this glorious undertaking. The world, created by Christ, was designed to reflect his glory, and one day, through all the extent of its wide population, to resound with his praise. To whom should we look, with deeper concern and more confident expectation, than to the young who are dedicated to God, that they will labour diligently, prayerfully, and persever-

ingly for this desirable consummation? On you it devolves, Christian youth, to create a new era in the missionary undertaking. Yours it is to be among the first to "bring the King back." Yours is the work, as consecrated priests of God, to bear forward the ark of Divine truth to its resting-place in the millennial Church. We are fallen in no ordinary period. Events, thickening everywhere, betoken that the day of the Lord's power is at hand, when He shall utterly overthrow and destroy terror-stricken enemies; when He will take to Him his great power and reign, and when the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Be it yours, in the spring and vigour of life, to enter with alacrity upon this work of faith and labour of love. Dedicate to it all your talents, your fervent prayers, pecuniary means, and personal exertions. Try to bring others to the same spirit and conduct. Resolve to labour to the end of life, whether at home or in a distant land, to bring sinners to Christ. Your labour will not be in vain in the Lord. What you sow you shall afterwards reap. A great and glorious harvest will at length reward your toil, and self-denial, and sacrifices. The nations of the saved shall bring their glory and riches to Zion; and as the redeemed converts from Jew and Gentile shall enter the heavenly Jerusalem, or as the tidings of their conversion are borne thither by the ministering spirits that take the deepest interest in the progress of Christ's kingdom on earth, the joys of eternity shall be enhanced. They that sow and they that reap shall rejoice together; and, in the triumphs of Christ's cause on earth, the ransomed in heaven shall share in the joy of their exalted Lord, and shall drink "rivers of pleasure at God's right hand for evermore."

SECT. IV.—*Filial respect for Parents.*

If the young would give evidence that they are influenced by the fear of the Lord, and would enjoy his abundant blessing, they must study carefully to obey "the first commandment with promise." The faithful performance of *relative duties* is the sure result of gracious principles in the heart—the evidence at once of their existence and power. Of all these duties, there are none whose obligation is more stringent, and whose observance is productive of more valuable fruits, than those of children towards their parents. The law of nature enjoins

filial respect and obedience. Children derive their earthly existence from their parents ; and they owe them much more, because of their love, compassion, and tenderness, than they can ever properly appreciate or repay. The young should early and frequently consider, that to their parents, as instruments, they are indebted not only for the care that was necessary for their preservation in infancy and childhood, but for the training of their minds ; the habits, intellectual and moral, by which they are distinguished ; their condition in life, religious instruction, and the hopes and prospects of a blessed immortality. None could do for them what Christian parents have done. To be insensible of the obligation to honour them, and to be neglectful of the duties which they owe them, is unnatural, and rarely escapes the marked punishment that follows as the award of unnatural crimes. What the law and light of nature declare, the precepts of Divine revelation enjoin, under the most weighty motives, and by the most solemn sanctions.

The precept which prescribes the duties of children is placed at the head of the second table of the Decalogue. The terms *father and mother* are employed as the appellations of *superiors* in other relations, as if to show that filial honour and obedience are to be as a model to other inferiors, in the performance of their respective duties ; and a *promise* is annexed to show the reward which a special Providence confers upon filial obedience.¹ The reiterated counsels of the Word to children declare the authority of God, the Everlasting Father, in this matter, and intimate the indispensable obligation and importance of this class of duties. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord : for this is right." "Children, obey your parents in all things : for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord."² "Honour thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise) ; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest live long on the earth."³

¹ There is an admirable propriety in placing the fifth commandment at the head of the precepts of the second table ; and enjoining *filial duties* as the first, and as comprehensive of all relative duties. The philosophy of the Decalogue far transcends that of any mere human code of morals. As the gyrations made by throwing a stone into water extend outwards and cannot be made to reverse their movements, so the performance of filial duties influences all other relations ; and if these are neglected, no others may be expected to be properly discharged. Society, civil and ecclesiastical, for the sake of its own best interests, requires to attach much importance to the due performance of filial duties.

² Ephes. vi. 1 ; Col. iii. 20.

³ Ephes. vi. 2, 3.

It is worthy of special remark, that the Saviour—our blessed and all-perfect example—particularly presents this feature in the most attractive aspect. The filial submission of the Saviour is a most prominent part of his character. At Nazareth, in childhood and youth, he was in subjection to his own parents; when about his heavenly Father's business, and fulfilling the high designs of his mission, He is, notwithstanding, often in the company of his mother; and amidst his last unspeakable agonies, He manifested towards her the highest filial tenderness and concern, by committing her to the fostering care of the disciple whom He loved. Children who would "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes," must, like Him, love and reverence their parents, and express their regard and affection by all filial obedience and submission.

The significant promise appended to the precept furnishes at once a reason to enforce the command, and a motive to impel to obedience. Children are required to obey, "that their days may be long upon the land which the Lord their God gives them." This promise was not designed to apply exclusively to the Israelitish people. To Christian youth, likewise, it holds out the assurance of a present reward in keeping God's commandments. The Apostle Paul expressly applies the assurance to Christian youth under the New Economy, only altering the terms of the promise, "*That thou mayest live long on the earth.*"² Temporal blessings follow filial respect and obedience; and where the duty to parents is performed from a right principle, under the Divine favour, benefits are enjoyed for this life and for the life to come. We are not warranted, it is true, to maintain that long life and outward prosperity are always the portion of dutiful children. God sometimes calls away his faithful servants from the scene of their labours, and confers upon them a heavenly reward instead of an earthly portion. It may seem good to his sovereign wisdom to try them with poverty and disappointment, to teach them that their rest is not here, and to wean their affections from the world. But it may be safely affirmed, that in the ordinary dispensations of Providence, outward blessings are bestowed upon those who are distinguished by obedience to the fifth commandment. Bad as the world is, it is an observable fact, that children that have been dutiful and kind to their parents, have very frequently had their temporal interests promoted. They are often employed as trustworthy by men who have themselves no sense of true

¹ Luke ii. 51.

² Ephesians vi. 3.

religion ; and the remark is not uncommonly made, that such are worthy of confidence, and their character is estimable, because they were faithful and kind to their parents. A special gracious Providence is evidently around dutiful children, protecting and preserving them, making for them, not unfrequently, a remarkable provision ; carving out for them their lot, and blessing their condition in life. This is the voice of the moral Governor of the world, proclaiming the rewards of filial obedience, and confirming the gracious promises of his Word.

It were, moreover, easy to show that the faithful discharge of duties to parents has a salutary and powerful influence upon all other relations. This is, to a large extent, the common sentiment of society, and it is abundantly verified in actual experience. Loving and dutiful children prove the best husbands or wives, the kindest masters, the most faithful servants, the best parents, the most devoted friends. And if they are afterwards called to occupy public official stations, they will discharge the duties of them with fidelity, integrity, and honour. Eminent ministers and missionaries, office-bearers of the Church, and civil rulers, have been previously wise children, that honoured their fathers, and were a joy to their mothers. The fruit of faithful parental training was first returned in affection and obedience to parents themselves. While thus blessing the knees that nursed them, and the paps that gave them suck, they were themselves doubly blessed. By the performance of a great fundamental duty in youth, they were prepared for more extended usefulness. The virtuous principles and affections that first put forth their tender buds in honouring parents, ripen and bear precious fruit, in dispensing benefits to a larger extent in society. Dutiful children become benefactors of mankind ; and even after they have fulfilled their destiny on earth, frequently do their works follow them. Future generations arise and call them blessed. Their memories are embalmed in the esteem and gratitude of posterity ; and their bright example is the means of leading others in the paths of virtue and happiness.

On the contrary, how often do unkind and disobedient children prepare a severe retribution for themselves ! God has said, "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father and mother." "Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression ; the same is the companion of a destroyer."¹ The curse often rests upon their minds. They are discontented and miserable ; or if they have, for a time, success in sin, it is only

¹ Deut. xxvii. 16 ; Proverbs xxviii. 24.

to procure for them more fearful plagues in future. "Disobedience to parents" is numbered among the hateful crimes of the heathen, that draw down upon them the signal vengeance of the Almighty.* This sin is greatly aggravated under the clear light and abundant privileges of the Gospel. There enters into it, indeed, so many evil ingredients, that we need not wonder that it is peculiarly heinous in the eye of Him who has the endearing title of the "Everlasting Father;" and that He pursues it with severest punishment. It has in it the basest ingratitude; it manifests the worst species of cruelty; it is the height of selfishness; it is rebellion against all proper authority, human and Divine; and it presents such an example of wickedness, that it seems every way right to hold it forth as a crime peculiarly detestable, and to mark it out for signal vengeance. Accordingly, its baleful fruits are often seen in disobedient children being left to the courses that work their ruin here and hereafter. Sometimes society marks them for infamy, and avoids them. If they become parents, not unfrequently their own children rise up to avenge on them the injuries which they inflicted on their parents; and going on in hardened rebellion, they live without God, and perish without hope. On earth there are few things more sad, than for a child to plant stings in the bosom of the parents to whom he is indebted for his earthly existence; and "to bring down" a parent's "grey hairs with sorrow to the grave," is marked in the Divine Record, as it is often exhibited in Providence, as the consummation of human wickedness, and the sure precursor of fearful vengeance.

We notice a few of the duties which Christian youth owe to their parents, the faithful performance of which will be their distinction and honour.

First. Children should honour their parents, *by loving them sincerely, and showing them, on all proper occasions, outward tokens of esteem and respect.* They owe them the tenderest affection. They are among the nearest objects which they have on earth, and they should always be among the *dearest*. To them they owe continually the love of gratitude; and right self-love will lead them to esteem and cherish those whose image they bear, whose care and kindness preserved and nurtured their infantile existence, and to whom they are indebted for innumerable benefits. Filial affection should discover itself by manifesting concern for the honour of parents, and by showing

* Romans i. 30.

them outward respect. God pronounces those "*accursed*" who "set light by father and mother."¹ In a very early portion of the Scriptures, this course is exemplified in the case of Ham, who mocked at his father's sinful infirmity. He himself, and his posterity for many generations, are, on this account, pronounced accursed; while Shem and Japheth, who discovered toward their father affectionate regard, even when he had fallen, are pronounced blessed.² "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."³ These declarations warn the young against all neglect of parents, all coldness of affection toward them, all contempt. True filial regard will manifest itself in conduct the reverse of all this. Cherished in the heart, it will never fail to show, on all proper occasions, tokens of esteem and affection. How beautifully is this exemplified in the history of Joseph! What a lovely instance does this distinguished servant of God present of filial concern and affection! In youth, he readily goes on a distant and perilous journey at his father's bidding; amidst his elevation in Egypt, and in his intercourse with his brethren, he never fails to make inquiries concerning "the old man," their father. He cannot rest satisfied till he brings him down to share his honours. When he arrives there, he falls on his neck, and embraces him; speaks of him with the highest respect to Pharaoh; brings his sons to him to receive his last benediction; waits at his dying bed, and bestows upon him the highest honours of sepulture when dead. Solomon, the most magnificent of the kings of Israel, when raised to sovereign power, testified his love to his mother, by showing her the highest honour: "The king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand."⁴ Children should show their love to their parents by caring for their bodies and souls, by regarding them always with filial veneration, by honouring them before others, and by performing towards them all offices of kindness. This is their honour as well as their duty, pleasing to God, and to themselves profitable.

Secondly. They should *readily obey their counsels and commands, and submit meekly and patiently to their reproofs*. Thus they principally honour them. While minors, and under the paternal care, they are "to obey them in the Lord,"⁵ in all

¹ Deut. xxvii. 16.

² Genesis ix.

³ Proverbs xxx. 17.

⁴ 1 Kings ii. 19.

⁵ Ephes. vi. 1-4.

things that do not contravene the commands of God, or that do not interfere with obedience to the highest Master. "As a son serveth his father," is a phrase that implies loving, ready obedience. Children are to seek the counsel and advice of their parents, and to hearken to it, in relation both to things temporal and spiritual. Judicious parents, from their experience and their interest in their children's welfare, are the best fitted to counsel and direct in matters of importance ; and children should feel it to be not less their interest than their duty to seek and to follow their counsel.

On one subject particularly, they should never overlook consulting their parents—in *choosing companions for life, and in disposing of themselves in marriage*, as well as in other important changes of their condition and circumstances in the world. In a case where their affections are so readily and strongly engaged, and where their happiness for time and eternity is concerned, it is of vast moment to the young to have suitable direction. Next to counsel sought from on high, children will find here a wise and faithful parent's advice invaluable ; and it should never be despised or disregarded. By seeking it, they acknowledge parents as their superiors, and they provide best for their own future happiness, and for the peace and welfare of families. The *examples* of Sacred Scripture recommend the practice of this duty. Isaac submitted to the direction of Abraham in choosing a wife ; and Jacob afterwards obeyed his father and mother in a similar case ; and he even recognized the consent of Laban, though an unnatural kinsman, as influencing his determination.¹ The conduct of the youthful patriarch, in these instances, evidently meets the Divine approval. On the other hand, the practice of Esau, in contracting marriage without asking advice of his parents, and in opposition to their mind, is recorded as an instance of filial disobedience, as an evidence that he was "a profane person," devoid of regard to God or religion, "which was a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah."² A striking and decisive proof of true wisdom, or of the folly that tends to ruin, is thus furnished : "*A wise son heareth his father's instruction ; but a scorner heareth not rebuke.*" "*A fool despiseth his father's instruction ; but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.*"³ Let the young learn early to value the advice of their parents. Let them study to choose or follow no course which is opposed to their mind. When parents exercise their authority in correcting children

¹ Gen. xxviii. 29.² Gen. xxvi. 35.³ Proverbs xiii. 1 ; xv. 5.

for faults committed, and in directing and commanding contrary to their inclinations, they should readily yield their will to that of their parents, and render a cheerful submission. The Apostle Paul, in enjoining submission to the sovereign appointments of God, under afflictions, enforces the precept, on the ground that children owe a reverential subjection to their parents: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of our spirits, and live?"¹ In truth, by the habit of ready submission to parental control, the young will themselves be gainers to an inestimable degree. They will learn self-denial, they will be preserved from many snares into which they might readily fall, and they will be the better prepared for the performance of the great duty, which is comprehensive of many others—bowing to the Divine appointments, and submitting to God's will in all things.

Thirdly. Children should *pray* for their parents. The best proof they can give of filial affection, the best return they can make for parental kindness, is to bear them on their spirits at the throne of grace, and to invoke blessings from heaven upon their heads. To godly parents there are few things more consolatory and supporting, than to be assured that they have an interest in their children's prayers; and even to others. such prayers may be the means of conferring benefits the most important. In some instances, irreligious parents have owed their conversion to the prayers of their children; and in many other cases, filial intercessions have drawn down blessings, temporal and spiritual, upon their parents. When children are in the habit of praying for their parents, they will thus be excited to the performance of all other duties which they owe them. And then, how sweet to have the experience of God blessing those to whom we owe so much—objects so interesting and dear, in answer to our prayers! Few sights in our world are more solemn and affecting than that of pious children, at the afflicted and dying bed of their parents, pouring out their hearts to God, in their behalf. This is a full return for all parental anxiety and labour on their account. Christian youth who thus act are themselves singularly honoured; and the best blessings are often, in this connection, doubly and trebly enjoyed by those who are taken away, and by those who remain. To the aged patriarch Jacob, it was promised as a singular favour, that "Joseph should put his hands upon his eyes,"² ministering to him

¹ Hebrews xii. 9.

² Genesis xlvii. 4.

in old age, when "the lookers out at the windows" would be darkened, and perhaps closing his eyes in death. This action, so simple and expressive, and which was doubtless performed in prayer, exhibits a beautiful example of filial obedience and respect, as the whole character of Joseph is a singularly impressive illustration of the rewards of filial piety and affection.

Fourthly. Children should consider themselves called *to cherish and assist their parents when in want and old age*. This part of filial regard is beautifully exemplified in the invitation of the same distinguished servant of God to his father, to come down to him to Egypt : "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt : come down unto me, tarry not. And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast. And there will I nourish thee, lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty."¹ The same duty is strikingly inculcated in the blessing which the Israelitish matrons invoked upon Naomi, upon the birth of a son to Boaz and Ruth : "He shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age."² If such a duty was plainly enjoined, and practised with Divine approbation under the former economy, how much greater the obligation to its performance under the clearer and more spiritual dispensation of the New Testament ! To their parents, children are indebted for support, and protection, and nourishment, in helpless infancy. They made provision for them in youth, when they could make none for themselves ; whatever they have of temporal enjoyments in life, they owe, in a great measure, to parental instruction, and guidance, and forethought ; and if parents have been faithful in bringing up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," their children are indebted to them for benefits which the return of outward gifts can never repay. Kindness to parents in providing for their wants, relieving their poverty, alleviating their trials, and nourishing their old age, is a debt from the payment of which children can never be absolved. Gratitude, regard to God's authority, and to their own best interests, demand that it should always be readily acknowledged and fully discharged. It may be added, that there are few duties, the performance of which so manifestly brings with it its own reward. The blessing of parents doubly given to children who

¹ Genesis xlv. 9-11.

² Ruth iv. 15.

are their help under infirmities, and the stay and comfort of their declining years, and the consciousness of having *requited*, in some measure, those who were the instruments of their existence and the guardians of their youth, afford grounds of pure pleasure and sweetest satisfaction to the mind. The example, moreover, of such filial regard is one of the most useful and impressive lessons which can be taught to posterity ; and those who have shown it often reap, in their old age and infirmities, in the kindness of their own children, the fruit of their tenderness and concern for their parents.

Finally. The youth of the Church *should walk in the ways of godly parents, and cherish their memories.* As there are few things more melancholy than to witness the children of Christian parents neglecting good instruction, and forsaking the ways in which their parents have walked—as there are few courses which are more evidently marked with tokens of the Divine displeasure, and which are more fraught with ruin, so to walk in the way which faithful parents have recommended and exemplified, is at once lovely and blessed. This is represented by the royal preacher as the first expression of “the fear of the Lord,” and as, at the same time, beautiful and attractive : “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother : for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.”¹ The instances of children walking in the footsteps of godly parents, that are recorded in the Scriptures, are evidently held forth to special commendation. Of Isaac and Jacob, the son and grandson of Abraham, it is related that they dwelt with him in tents, “the heirs with him of the same promise.” The descendants of Jonadab, long after, are held up as an example to a whole nation, because they obeyed the commandment, and walked in the ways of their father ; and as the fruit of their filial obedience, blessings are guaranteed to them for many generations. “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel ; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you : therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.”²

It is on the principle that children walk in the steps of godly parents, that God exhibits Himself to them as the source of all comfort and blessing, under the endearing title of their “*Father's God.*” “The Lord is my strength and song, and He

¹ Proverbs i. 8, 9.

² Jeremiah xxxv. 18, 19.

is become my salvation ; He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation ; my father's God, and I will exalt Him." ¹ A course of piety is styled "the way of the God of our father's," as not only that which He enjoins, but as that in which our fathers walked, and found peace and comfort ; and blessings are sought and realized in walking in the same path. With this view did David the monarch of Israel give his parting charge to his son and successor, "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." ² And in the same spirit did Solomon, and the many thousands of Israel, invoke God's presence and blessing at the dedication of the temple : "The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers : let Him not leave us, nor forsake us." ³ "The God of our fathers," we have reason to expect, will be with us, to enlighten, sustain, and prosper us, when we adhere to the path which they pointed out to us, and in which they themselves travelled to glory. While we should love and obey Him as our God and portion, and never forsake our own and our father's best Friend, we may rest assured, that as He was with them, so He will be with us, guiding and protecting us, and crowning us with loving-kindness and tender mercy.

The memory of faithful parents, when they are gone, should ever be embalmed in the hearts of children. They are entitled to live in those whom they nursed for God, and trained for religion and virtue ; and the best way in which children can show that they cherish the memory of departed parents, that they bear in mind their counsels and example, and regard with affection their names and conduct, is to walk in their ways. Like them, let them value the Bible, and intercourse with God in secret. Let them perfume the family altar with the incense of their prayers and praises ; aim to have their "conversation in heaven ;" and in the punctual and faithful discharge of all relative duties, to keep a "conscience void of offence toward God and toward man." The place in the sanctuary of godly parents, and their sphere of usefulness in the world, should be filled by children esteeming it their honour to imitate and emulate their parents in a life of godliness and integrity. Young persons will reap honour, and unspeakable benefit, from walking in such a course. Their fathers' God will bless them ; their piety will be increased and invigorated ; their example, in following the good instructions which they early imbibed, will deprive the infidel and the

¹ *Exodus* xv. 2.² *1 Chronicles* xxviii. 9.³ *1 Kings* viii. 57.

scoffer of their bitterest taunts against religion, and their conduct may be the means of attracting many others to the paths of virtue.

The instances of the children of distinguished servants of God walking in their parents' footsteps are not a few; and those that have been deemed worthy of special record serve to illustrate the eminent blessing that has followed such a course. The sons of Philip Henry and President Edwards not only inherited a large portion of the sanctified talent of their parents, but were honoured to advance the Lord's work, in which their parents greatly delighted. Not a few of the faithful ministers and elders of the Church have been the sons of ministers, and of other faithful servants of God; and through all ages the children of the righteous have, to a large extent, been the most devoted members of the Church, and the best benefactors of the world. A living American author states, that the descendants of John Rodgers, the first martyr in Queen Mary's reign, *of the tenth and eleventh generations*, yet occupy a distinguished place among pious persons in America: "With a single exception, the oldest son in the family has been a clergyman; some of them eminently distinguished for learning and piety; and there are few families now in this land, a greater proportion of whom are pious than of that family."¹ While a fact like this furnishes a great encouragement to Christian parents to educate their children for God, it evidently holds forth an abundant blessing to the young who walk in the footsteps of godly parents. God's gracious promise is, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." "As for me, this is my covenant with you, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever."²

We would affectionately and earnestly urge the youth of the Church to consider the duties which they owe to their parents, and to betake themselves faithfully to their performance. They are a principal part of the work prescribed to them in the precept which is impressively designated, "The first commandment with promise." Whether they would enjoy peace and satisfaction in their own bosom, the favour and esteem of good men, or manifold benefits in providence and grace, or by

¹ Barnes's *Notes on Isaiah*, vol. iii. p. 253; Cumming's ed.

² Isaiah lix. 21.

their example be a blessing to others, "let them first show piety at home," by requiting well their parents. Children should begin early to walk cheerfully in the path of filial obedience; and throughout life, while parents continue in the world, they should ever discover towards them all reverence and respect. No alteration of circumstances, no change in their condition in life, will free them wholly from the obligation of this primary duty. Even in houses of their own, and when heads of families themselves, they are bound to love, and pray for, and cherish their parents, and to provide for their wants, if they thus require their care. In cultivating this spirit, and in exemplifying it upon all proper occasions, they employ the sure means of conferring benefits upon their own households. Joseph, when in an elevated station in the land of Egypt, brought his two sons to his aged father, and obtained, as he sought, his blessing. The blessing of godly parents, who have been repaid with filial regard, will descend upon children's children; and the lesson imparted by the heads of Christian families to their children, by their honouring and cherishing their parents, and walking in their ways, is among the most important and impressive that they can possibly communicate. The *promise* appended to the precept which enjoins filial reverence and obedience, in fine, extends to every relation in life. It embraces the whole outward condition, and guarantees peace within, and prospects for the future, cheering and ennobling. Filial duties, on the other hand, neglected, no other relative duties will be properly performed. Whenever this principal part of "piety at home" is duly exemplified, we may constantly expect integrity and fidelity in other relations; and the blessing which the Divine Lawgiver annexes to filial obedience will sweeten trials, animate in duty, set upon the head, and furnish, here and hereafter, a crown of beauty and honour.

SECT. V.—*Duty of the youth of the Church to devote themselves to the Christian Ministry.*

That the Christian Ministry is an office of unspeakable importance, and that it is the special duty of the Church to provide for its continuance and efficiency, are truths generally admitted by all who acknowledge the authority of Divine revelation, and who are concerned for the interests of true

religion. Yet the subject of providing a succession of faithful and devoted ministers in the Church has not hitherto received that attention, in almost any quarter, which its intrinsic value demands. The Church has been generally and criminally neglectful in this matter. Ministers themselves have not sufficiently magnified their office, or inculcated the paramount duty of raising up and sending forth labourers into the Gospel harvest. The members of the Church have not duly felt their solemn obligation in this respect, and have neither sought in fervent prayer this chief of the Saviour's ascension-gifts, nor held out that cordial sympathy and support which might encourage young persons to aspire to the sacred office. Christian parents have not presented to their children the high honour and importance of the ministry, or shown them sufficiently, that, compared with it, worldly distinction and riches are of no value. And young persons who were early dedicated to God, and who owe everything valuable that they possess to the Church and its ministry, manifest no inclination or desire to enter the ministry, and readily turn aside to other pursuits. Owing to such causes there is at present, throughout the different sections of the Church in various countries, a confessed paucity of candidates for the ministry ; and this is so great, in many instances, as to threaten consequences to the Church, and to the interests of true religion, the most serious and alarming.

The ministry of the Word is God's grand instrument for maintaining and diffusing the truth throughout the earth. Upon its continuance and efficiency the prosperity, if not the very existence, of the Church is largely dependent. If souls are to be awakened and converted ; if the progress of sin and error is to be arrested ; if the nations of the world are to be savingly enlightened, and the Redeemer's glory to fill the whole earth, the ministry of the Gospel is indispensably required ; and there is need that this instrumentality be greatly increased and strengthened. "After that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? And how shall they preach, except they be sent ?" ¹

The present scarcity of preachers of the Word, and of candidates for the ministry, is, in many respects, sad and

¹ 1 Corinthians i. 21 ; Romans x. 14, 15.

discouraging, and demands the serious concern of the friends of truth to inquire after the causes, and to supply a remedy. The larger number of evangelical churches in Britain, on the continent of Europe, and in America, complain that there is not at present a sufficient number of students, or candidates for the ministry, in preparation to supply the vacancies that exist in the Church, or that may be expected soon to occur by death or otherwise. Then there are few or none in training to enter upon the large field of evangelistic effort among Jew or Gentile, or the vast multitudes of the neglected in Christian lands. There has been an increased and very observable paucity of candidates for the ministry in recent years. Parents who make a profession of religion manifest less disposition than at former times to dedicate their sons to the ministry, or to undertake the expense and self-denial required for this object; while the youth of Christian families, the hopes of the Church, are easily allured by the prospects of worldly riches and respect which are presented on every side, and undervalue a profession which calls for self-sacrifice and devoted exertion, and whose honours and rewards are to be sought for among those things which are invisible and eternal. Of Zion it may be said, in the plaintive words of the prophet, "*There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth.*"¹ This deficiency of candidates for the ministry is the more melancholy, when we consider the great work to which the Church in our day is summoned, and which she cannot possibly neglect or postpone, without the highest criminality. She is called to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, in opposition to the hosts of error and infidelity. The ignorant and destitute masses in Christian lands are, by aggressive movements, to be instructed. The world is to be evangelized, and the Gospel preached to every creature. Wide doors of access to Pagans, Jews, Mahometans, the devotees of Rome, and the corrupt churches of the East, have been thrown open; and facilities above those enjoyed at any former period of the Church's or the world's history, are presented to claim the nations as the Church's covenanted inheritance, and to seek their subjection to the sceptre of Immanuel. Besides, the time of the end draws nigh. The approaching downfall of antichristian power will remove the grand obstacle to the general diffusion of the truth. The responsibility of the Church to assume a solemn waiting position, and to have in readiness a multitude of

¹ Isaiah li. 18.

prepared labourers to go throughout the nations, and gather in the wide-spread harvest, is, from present aspects in Providence, greatly augmented. Should not Christians, at such a crisis, be earnestly concerned about the means of carrying on the Lord's work, and consider their obligations to provide an able and faithful ministry in the Church, and numbers of devoted labourers, ready to go, as God may call them, and Providence may open their way, to any part of the earth, to promote the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom?

Before adverting to the special call to the youth of the Church, to consider their obligations to devote themselves to the ministry, we offer a few general remarks on the duty of others in relation to this important matter.

First. It is a paramount *duty of the Church to provide an able and faithful ministry*. This position is susceptible of the clearest and fullest proof. It is matter of express Divine prescription. The great ends for which the Gospel ministry was instituted, the Church's mission to expound, defend, and propagate the truth, and to convert the nations, and the example of the Church in the primitive and purest times, all show that this is to be regarded as a principal duty of the Church, the due performance of which is of the most salutary consequence, and the neglect of which must be most injurious. It is an undeniable fact, which ecclesiastical history abundantly attests, that when the Church has been spiritually prosperous, she has taken all pains, and willingly undertook the necessary expense, to raise up a faithful ministry. No surer indication, on the other hand, can be given of declension in the Church, and of the withholding of the Divine blessing, than indifference on this subject, or the refusal to employ effort and expense for its attainment.

The ministry which it is incumbent on the Church to provide must be *able and faithful*. Such a ministry alone is fitted to advance the cause of truth, and accomplish the Church's high mission in the world; connected with it alone may be expected a large measure of the Divine approval and blessing. A faithful and able ministry will be distinguished for piety, sound understanding, good sense and discretion, competent knowledge, and ability and perseverance in the discharge of arduous duties. Although the Church can neither impart piety, nor give intellectual power, yet there are means, which are within her province, and which it is her present duty to employ, for training and calling forth such a ministry.

The Church is certainly bound to search for, and carefully select from among the youth committed to her care, those who are endowed with piety and talents, and encourage them to seek the ministry. The children of the Church are, in a proper sense, the Church's property. She has a right to the highest services of the best of them. As she is the spiritual parent of all the youth under her jurisdiction, so she should direct special attention to such as are fitted for public service in the work of the ministry. Wherever young men are found who unite fervent piety with competent talents, it is their duty to seek the Gospel ministry. So it is the Church's duty to single them out, encourage them to come forward, and give them all that preparation which human means can supply, for engaging in the service of the sanctuary.¹

Members of the Church who have considerable worldly prosperity, would honour God, and do an important service to Christ, by charging themselves with the expense of training deserving youths for the ministry.² The Church should, moreover, establish *seminaries* for the instruction and training of candidates for the ministry, place them under the care of able instructors, and undertake to supply the funds requisite for this purpose. As much as possible, she should aim to have the education of the rising ministry exclusively under her own control, direction, and superintendence. By making such a

¹ The late venerable Dr Alexander of Princeton, America, in an article published in the *New York Observer*, regards it as a sin to be mourned over, when congregations have no young men in training for the ministry—"When particular churches are rearing no candidates for the ministry, there must be a grievous fault somewhere, in relation to this important concern. As it is a matter of common duty, when there has been a continual barrenness, there must have been a want of due culture. Why have you no pious young men on their way to the ministry? Have you not many sons, who, if their hearts were touched by the finger of God, might be useful? But you may say, We cannot give them grace. True; this is not the ground of your accountability. But have you, as a Church, prayed for the conversion of the dear youth, that they might be prepared for this work?"

² The considerate liberality of John Thornton, Esq., enabled Cornelius Winter to conduct his seminary for preparing young men for the ministry. It was by such aid that the excellent William Jay was enabled to come forward to the ministry, and to occupy the commanding station of usefulness which he so long and so honourably filled. His Autobiography and Memorials relate several lovely instances of a similar application of Christian benevolence. We would greatly desire to see the spirit that has, to a large extent, characterized distinguished English Dissenters, in sustaining their theological seminaries, and in encouraging the progress of pious and deserving youth towards the ministry, manifested in other sections of the Church.

provision for the instruction of her own candidates for the ministry, the Church can at all times inspect and regulate the course of their education, see that it be sound, thorough, and faithful, and have a proper control over the instructors. By this means, too, the Church can furnish a more extensive, accurate, and complete course of instruction, availing herself of the best instructors, and of all improvements in education. The course of instruction will thus be uniform, and based upon the only right foundation—that of the inspired Word. The candidates for the ministry, thus trained, may be expected to be of *essential service to each other*—forming early friendships, exciting one another to deep and earnest research, and forming plans for future activity and usefulness.¹

The Church, moreover, by providing a *cheerful and liberal support* for the ministry, should hold out all encouragement to the young to devote themselves to this important service. This is at once her duty and her interest. They who minister at the altar should live by the altar. "SO HATH THE LORD ORDAINED IN ALL THE CHURCHES." As neglecting to do this is plainly opposed to the ordinance of Christ, and has manifestly tended to cause the paucity of candidates to which we refer, so the ready furnishing of an honourable support to the ministry will act as a stimulus to lead the young to devote themselves to the service of the sanctuary. Above all, the Church should practically observe the injunction of the Redeemer: "PRAY YE THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO SEND FORTH LABOURERS INTO HIS HARVEST."² The calamity of few labourers in the midst of a plenteous harvest is mainly to be ascribed to the neglect of the Divine provision for relief. Want of fervent, individual, united, and persevering prayer for this definite object, as one of unspeakable moment, has caused the blessing to be withholden. If we would have an adequate supply of able and faithful ministers, the Church must be stirred up to earnest and importunate prayer on this subject. The Saviour has solemnly enjoined this, as the grand

¹ Even a comparatively small section of the Church might institute and liberally support a theological seminary for training candidates for the ministry. They might so enlarge the plan of instruction gradually, as to comprise a complete course of instruction in other departments of study. The Church's constant aim should be to have the whole education of her ministry completely under her own direction and control; and, in our day, by the enlarged liberality of her members, this might readily be accomplished.

² Matthew ix. 38.

means of securing the blessing. He Himself practised it in calling and commissioning his apostles; and of his last most expressive prayer before He suffered, a considerable part is taken up in invoking blessings suited to their case and circumstances, upon the apostles and future ministers of the Gospel.

The necessity of the Church seeking in prayer a supply of labourers appears in this, that *prayer brings the Church directly to God*, who can alone supply able and approved instruments for his work. Calvin justly remarks: "As no man will of himself become a sincere and faithful minister of the Gospel, and as none discharge in a proper manner the office of teacher, but those whom the Lord raises up and endows with the gifts of his Spirit, wherever we observe a scarcity of pastors, we must raise our eyes to Him to afford the remedy." It has been appropriately observed by an able and devoted advocate of scriptural and ministerial education in America: "The two thoughts of the ministry and of God should go together in the common associations of prayer, and be inwrought into the devotional habits of the Church. God is the only true source of the supply. He only is Author of the requisite gifts and graces. False views and sentiments will become current, just in proportion as the Gospel duty of *prayer* is intermitted; and an unsent, and of course an unqualified ministry, always prompt to volunteer its unhallowed offices, will thus invade and curse the Church."¹ Prayer for the increase of labourers will, moreover, lead us to employ all active means for accomplishing this object. Belief in the Divine sovereignty, instead of superseding, calls into operation all the subordinate energies of the Church. The ministry praying for additional labourers will use all the *other* means that providentially tend to secure the desired end. Especially they will set themselves wisely to seek out, and watch over young men who appear to possess the requisite qualifications for the sacred office. The people, too,

¹ *Prayer for an Increase in the Ministry*, by the Rev. C. Van Rensselaer, D.D.; an article in vol. vi. of *Home, the School, and the Church*. We have peculiar pleasure in recommending this work, published in annual volumes, by Dr Van Rensselaer, the excellent Secretary of the Education Scheme of the Old School General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of North America. Each volume contains a variety of able articles, original and selected, on subjects connected with education—domestic, scholastic, and ministerial—and the principles and spirit are alike worthy of all commendation. The work is indeed a rich treasury of matters of the highest importance to all who are interested in the cause of scriptural education, and in the increase and efficiency of the Christian ministry.

thus praying, will not be found wanting in the use of scriptural means. They will consecrate and endeavour to train the youth of the Church to the Lord ; and, by instructions and example, encourage them to give themselves to the public service of Christ and his Church, at whatever cost and self-denial.

The Church's neglect to employ aright the means which have an ordained connection with the increase of the ministry, must be mainly ascribed to *inadequate prayers*. "Where there is little or no prayer on this subject, there will be little or no pains and energy displayed in reference to a matter which, if unattended to, will take no care of itself. The world will sweep away our young men into secular professions, with a resistless and tyrannical power, unless counteracting influences are put forth in the name of the Redeemer. Prayer and efforts, faith and work, naturally co-operate."¹ Let there be fervent and heartfelt prayer in relation to this matter, and the Church will expend means, and employ her energies, in bringing her youth to Christ and the ministry of the Word ; and gracious success may be expected to crown her exertions.

Secondly. There are others, who have a special interest in this subject, whose efforts may be eminently instrumental in promoting the increase of the ministry. Of these, a first place is to be assigned to *Christian teachers of youth* and to *Christian parents*. Both may do much for the increase of the ministry, if they are duly alive to their responsibility, and if they form a due estimate of the important results of faithful ministerial labours. Christian teachers, knowing the faculties and dispositions of the young, may search out youth whose gifts promise usefulness in the ministry. They should assign the first place in their instructions to religion. They should present the subject of the Christian ministry to their own minds, and to those of their pupils, as one of high importance, converse with promising pupils on the subject, and pray with and for them on this matter. And they should meditate frequently on the exalted prospect of the blessed results that will accrue to themselves, as instruments, in preparing faithful labourers for the Redeemer's vineyard, and that will follow to the youth thus

¹ Some of the Presbyterian Churches in America, that were sensible of the evil of the paucity of candidates for the ministry, have, of late years, been in the habit of observing a day of fasting and humiliation on this subject. We have seen it recently stated, that since they entered on such an observance, an increase of deserving candidates has taken place.

² See note at the end of this Section

employed, and to the Church, through their devoted exertions. Here the Saviour's assurance will be amply realized, "One soweth and another reapeth, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." ¹

Christian parents have, of all others, a special concern in the increase of a faithful ministry. God has given them their children to train them for his service; and they should aim always to fulfil the object of their early dedication, that they may be wholly the Lord's, and may serve Him, in the way best fitted to advance his glory in the earth. Parents should diligently teach their children the nature and designs of the ministry, and show them its dignified character and surpassingly excellent objects. They should make it matter of earnest prayer, as they renew the dedication of their children to God, that He would endue them with his grace, and call them to the highest usefulness in his Church. Parents should, moreover, exemplify before their children a large, liberal public spirit, and should willingly practise self-denial, to furnish to their children the requisite education for public usefulness in the sanctuary. If the children discover aptitude or talents for studies with a view to the ministry, they should converse with them at times, and pray with them on this subject. Like Hannah, the mother of Samuel, they should thus pay their solemn vows, by surrendering the dearest objects of their affections to the service of the Lord and his sanctuary. They should account it their highest honour to have any of their children employed as servants of Zion's King, and should willingly make sacrifices for the attainment of an object so excellent and important. Parents, manifesting this spirit, are sometimes greatly blessed in their children. The Lord gives them "*their wages*" in the eminent piety and usefulness of their children. A dedication like Hannah's is accepted; and sons, like those of Zebedee and Eunice, and the reformers and martyrs of Scotland, not only reflect undying honour upon those that gave them birth, but are likewise rendered the instruments of blessings, extensive and enduring to the Church, through many generations.

Thirdly. *The youth of the Church* themselves should seriously consider their obligations to devote themselves to the service of Christ, in the ministry of the Gospel. The youthful readers of this volume have seen that the chief end of their life is to glorify God, and to do good to others, rather than to seek worldly aggrandizement, and to live to themselves. If such

¹ John iv. 37.

primary views of the ends of life, and of their own obligations, are entertained by the young, they should—

First of all, be concerned to *choose for themselves a right profession in life*. This is of vast moment, whether as it respects themselves or others, whether as it concerns their happiness or usefulness in life, or their hopes and prospects in the world to come. A wrong choice of a profession for life may lead to the misapplication of talent, or misspending of opportunities—may cause future unavailing regrets, and may incur the Divine displeasure, blighting prospects that were fondly cherished, and issuing in final rejection. On the other hand, by choosing the profession to which Divine providence appeared to call, and for which the young person had suitable qualifications, and entering upon it, with a single eye to God's glory, the most beneficial results may be anticipated. The young will then have, amidst the activities and trials of life, the consciousness of being servants of God, and may depend on his gracious support and blessing. In considering the choice of a profession, the claims of the Christian ministry should be seriously pondered by the youth of the Church. If they have recognized their early dedication, and yielded themselves to the Lord, then they should seriously consider, before they surrender themselves to any pursuit for life, how they may, in the limited span of their earthly existence, best promote the Divine glory, and do good to mankind. When the young have personal piety and adequate talents, and when circumstances in Providence are not unfavourable for the acquisition of due qualifications for the ministry, they should regard the question as solemnly addressed to themselves in particular, "Ought they not to give themselves to a course of preparation for the work of the ministry above any other profession?" They should learn early to cherish a high veneration for the Christian ministry. They should regard the faithful minister's work as most honourable, and as more directly conversant with the great ends of man's existence, than any worldly pursuit. And they should seriously weigh the matter of themselves living to the highest purpose while on earth; and of accomplishing, during the limited time of life, the greatest amount of good, whether as it respects God's glory, or the salvation of others. The young should think that as God made them, so they are his, without the least qualification. He has an absolute right at all times to command their services. Not only are they, as creatures, his property, but all theirs too is his—their time.

their faculties of soul and body, their learning, their possessions, their very sources of enjoyment, are his. He has therefore an indispensable right to claim that they and all that they have should be devoted to Him, and expended in promoting his glory. Consequently, they have no more right to employ their talents for the promotion of mere worldly or selfish interests, than to take another man's property.

The following questions have been suggested as suitable for the young to address to themselves in reference to their choice of a profession, and with special regard to the claims of the ministry :—

“Is there any office in which we can render more substantial service to our fellow-men, or more advance the glory of God ?

“Should not the good of society, and the glory of God, influence us in the choice of a profession ?

“Is there any office which affords more or higher prospects of true happiness in this world ?

“Is there any office which affords as many incitements to piety, as many helps and facilities in the work of salvation, or more comfortable prospects of future glory and reward ?

“Does it require the relinquishment of any habit or indulgence necessary to the highest enjoyment ?

“Are not multitudes in the world possessed of the ability to serve God in the work of the ministry, prevented by love of ease, or of pleasure, or profit, or of distinction ?

“While it is admitted that much may be done, in every condition of life, for the advancement of piety and the spiritual benefit of fellow-men, can as much be done in any other, for these ends, as in the ministry ?”¹

Let these inquiries be personally and prayerfully weighed, and an anxious concern cherished to be guided to a right choice of a profession ; and the youth of the Church may be led to see the dignity and importance of the ministry, and be persuaded of their own duty to devote themselves to this service.

2. The youth of the Church should *have a primary regard to the glory of Christ, the claims of the Church, and the wants of the world*, in deciding for themselves the question, whether they should seek the Christian ministry.

A call from God to the ministry has always been connected with fervent concern for the Redeemer's glory, and an earnest

¹ *Episcopal Recorder*, 1839 ; quoted in *Home, the School, and Church*, vol. ii. p. 183.

desire for the salvation of perishing souls. When Isaiah beheld an overpowering display of the Divine glory, and witnessed the lofty service of the seraphim, he was prepared to respond to the inquiry, "*Whom shall we send, and who shall go for us?*" and willingly to answer, "*Here am I, send me.*"¹ The great ends of the ministry are the noblest and most exalted on earth. They embrace the advancement of the Redeemer's glory throughout the world, the universal diffusion and triumph of truth, the conversion, sanctification, and everlasting welfare of man, and the prosperity and blessing of all nations. How excellent is such an office and work? How dignified and blessed is it, while engaging in it, and prosecuting it, to be a co-worker with God, and to be employed in carrying forward, to a sure and successful issue, God's glorious designs of mercy to our world? In being entrusted with the ministry of the Gospel, human beings enjoy an honour above the angels. These holy spirits "desire to look into these things," but infinite wisdom has not seen fit to employ them as "ambassadors for Christ." It is those who have felt the disease, and known the value of the remedy, that are employed to recommend the Physician and the balm of Gilead to others. The Saviour's name, we are assured, "shall endure for ever. Men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed."²

The Church of Christ is the most excellent institution in the world, and it is destined hereafter to appear most glorious—the joy of all the earth. Its "righteousness shall yet go forth as brightness, and its salvation as a lamp that burneth."³ This most desirable consummation, we are expressly told, shall take place in connection with an increase of faithful and devoted ministers: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."⁴ The purity, revival, enlargement, and establishment of the Church are dependent, in a high degree, upon the ministry. The young—Zion's children—should regard themselves as peculiarly called to seek the Church's good. To her they are indebted for the most distinguishing privileges, for every distinction and excellence in their own character.

¹ Isaiah vi. 8.² Psalm lxxii. 17.³ Isaiah lxii. 1.⁴ Isaiah lxii. 6, 7. In the Hebrew it is "The Lord's remembrancers," and has special reference to the fervent pleadings in prayer of faithful ministers and others, in behalf of the Church of Christ.

for the blessing upon their lot in life, as well as for the glorious prospects of a blissful immortality. They should therefore feel themselves ever called to labour to promote the Church's peace and prosperity, and to extend the blessings which they have enjoyed in connection with her institutions to others in spiritual destitution, and that to the widest limits. The children of Zion are designed to be the instruments of her future enlargement and blessing. Their own comfort and happiness are to be sought and realized in this connection. "*They shall prosper that love thee.*" Viewing the present low state of religion in many parts of the Church, her limited extension throughout the world, and the assurances of the Word concerning her future glory, the young should solemnly consider the call to devote themselves wholly to the grand enterprise of establishing Christ's kingdom in the earth, and should give themselves to the ministry. They should fix their eyes upon the unspeakable glory of being the instruments by which the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and the nations of the saved shall bring their glory and riches to Zion.

The spiritual condition of the world, too, should lead the youth of the Church seriously to consider what they ought themselves to do, to remove its countless miseries, and to bring it into willing subjection to its rightful Sovereign. There are millions of the human family sunk in idolatry, superstition, and ungodliness. There are vast multitudes in every place living without God and without hope in the world. The dread cry of perishing souls is addressed to every Christian, and there is fearful criminality in neglecting it, and in making no efforts to rescue human beings from destruction. The Gospel is the only remedy to relieve this misery, and the ministry of the Word the grand instrumentality for applying it. Let the state of perishing sinners, and the concerns of the Redeemer's glory, be properly laid to heart, and then, in many instances, the question of the personal responsibility of the youth of the Church to give themselves to the ministry of the sanctuary will be decided. The curse of Meroz came upon its inhabitants, not because they took part with the enemies of Israel, but because "*they came not forth to the help of the Lord against the mighty.*" Let the young fear such a doom; and at a period when many doors are opened for the spread of the truth, and the cry of perishing millions for spiritual help resounds throughout the Church, let them dedicate themselves to the great work

of winning souls to Christ, and of gathering jewels for his diadem of glory.

3. *The unspeakable benefit which will accrue to themselves* from devoting themselves to the Christian ministry, should induce the youth of the Church to enlist in this service. The Christian minister, though called to peculiarly arduous labour, and exposed to special temptations and trials, yet occupies the most honourable and dignified office on earth. He is an ambassador of heaven's King, a co-worker with God, a star in the Redeemer's right hand, reflecting his glory, and enlightening others that sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Privileges of the highest and most valuable kind are the portion of the faithful minister. Separated to a spiritual office, he is exempted from the distracting cares and annoyances that are incident to other situations in life. Dedicated to the public service of God and his Church, he is set apart for the daily study of the Word, and of mysteries into which angels ever desire to look. His work is at the throne. His labour is ennobling. His grand aim is to advance the Redeemer's glory, to exhibit and illustrate the riches of his benevolence, and to spread throughout the world his renowned fame. What employment on earth may bear a moment's comparison with this? Then, the supports and rewards of faithful ministers surpass those which belong to the highest earthly office or station. The Redeemer honours them that honour Him. His gracious presence is guaranteed to them always. Their labour is not in vain in the Lord. The blessed truths which they study and declare to others are the nourishment and life of their own spirits. They enjoy the peculiar favour of the glorious Master whom they love and serve. His power and Spirit attend upon their ministrations, and render them effectual for accomplishing the purposes of eternal love and mercy. Honoured to win souls to Christ, they have at length those whom they were instrumental in awakening as a crown of rejoicing. Turning others to righteousness, they shine as "the brightness of the firmament," and "as the stars for ever and ever."

Such being the objects and advantages of the Christian ministry, should not the youth of the Church seriously consider its paramount claims upon their personal devotedness? If they duly reflect upon the great end of their being, the advancement to the utmost of the Divine glory, the paramount claims of the Redeemer upon the homage of the heart, and the

consecration of the life to his service, the present condition of the Church and the world, and their own benefit and happiness for time and eternity, this office must appear worthy of being an object of peculiar veneration and desire. The period of the world in which the young are called to Christ's service is one of great and growing interest. The exalted Mediator is about to claim the nations all for his covenanted inheritance. Most momentous issues are shortly to be decided. The King of Zion, in coming to take his great power to reign, will stain the pride of human glory, and show the littleness of all worldly pursuits, when compared with the propagation of his Gospel throughout the earth. At such an eventful crisis, the young should seek grace from on high, that they may be enabled willingly to relinquish the prospects and honours of a vain world, come forth with holy resolution on the Lord's side, and dedicate their lives to the honourable service of making known the Lord's light and saving health, of rescuing men from the bondage of sin and Satan, and filling the earth with the effulgence of the Redeemer's glory.

The following additional questions, from the paper to which we have already referred, should be deeply pondered by the young, in relation to this all-important subject :—

“Is it not often the case, that the greatest good is rendered to the cause of religion, and the souls of men, by persons not possessed of singular abilities?”

“Do not the promises of Jesus Christ—‘I am with thee always, even to the end of the world,’ ‘My grace is sufficient for you’—furnish every good man with just grounds of confidence in this respect?”

“Is it not as much, and even in a greater degree, our duty to rely upon *the sufficiency of grace* for the work of the *ministry*, than in the work of *individual salvation*?”

“Do not the solemn and unequivocal promises made to persevering prayer through the intercession of Christ, extend to prayers offered up for ability to glorify God, by advancing the salvation of souls?”

It may be well, too, for the youth of the Church who have made a profession, and given themselves to the Lord, to weigh such inquiries as these :—

“Have you ordinary talents? Have you a pious disposition? Do you love Christ, and the souls of men? Is not Christ's almighty grace promised you; and is it not sufficient for you?”

“Has not his providence afforded you means, or the prospect of the assurance of means, to qualify for the work of the ministry? Would not the efforts to be used for your worldly establishment in some other manner succeed in accomplishing this?

“Are not souls *now perishing*, which, by the blessing of God, you might be instrumental in saving? Will you hear Christ in vain? Shall they perish, without your doing aught to save them?”¹

While diligently weighing these questions, let the guidance and over-ruling power of the Holy Ghost be earnestly invoked. It is certain that, of those who have been inclined to give themselves to the ministry, and who have become approved labourers in the Redeemer’s vineyard, not a few have afterwards, with the whole heart, blessed God that they were thus led, and that they were honoured to have a part in the glorious enterprize of making known God’s salvation throughout the nations.

¹ *Home, the School, and the Church*, vol. ii. pp. 184, 185.

NOTE.

Seasons of special prayer for an increase of labourers in the Gospel harvest should be observed not only by individuals, but likewise by the Church collectively. The following suitable reasons for such an exercise have been presented to the Presbyterian Church in America, in the annual periodical of the Board of Education. They deserve an attentive consideration :—

REASONS, &c.

1. " Because the harvest is plenteous, and the labourers are few. Many organized congregations are destitute of the stated administration of the Word and ordinances. Large tracts of territory densely peopled in our land, are but very partially supplied with the ministrations of the Gospel. And from heathen countries, the repeated, urgent, importunate cry is heard. Send those who will aid us in breaking to the perishing multitudes the bread of life ; send quickly, and send many, for the harvest is ripe for the sickle.

2. " Because it is the very object for which our Lord Jesus directed special prayer to be offered. The circumstances being similar, the Church will be guilty of neglecting his particular injunctions, if she fails to do it. And the sin of omission, not less than the sin of commission, incurs his frown.

3. " Because compliance with his direction in this respect is a test of discipleship, under the general rule, ' If ye love me, keep my commandments.' The love of Christ therefore should constrain us to obey Him.

4. " Because the ministry is the gift of God—' No man taketh upon himself this honour, but he that is called, as was Aaron.' His special gifts to his Church should, therefore, be the subject of his special regard.

5. " Because the hearts of all men are in his hands, and He can bring thousands, and tens of thousands, who are standing in the market-place all the day idle, into his vineyard, and find them ample employment.

6. " Because the ministry is the chief instrumentality which God has appointed for the conversion of sinners, and for the edification of the Church. It is but reasonable, therefore, that we should offer special prayer for large accessions to the number to whom this work is committed.

7. " Because God will be inquired after by the house of Israel for these very blessings which He has it in his heart to bestow.

8. " Because there is no reason to anticipate the promised glory of the Church, until the multitudes are greatly increased who shall publish the salvation of the Gospel ; and no reason to anticipate this increase, but in answer to the prayers of his people.

9. " Because these gifts are more highly valued when they are bestowed in answer to prayer.

10. " Because ministers, like other men, are mortal ; and the congregation that has a pastor to-day may be vacant to-morrow. If therefore there be not an increase of labourers, it may be very difficult to obtain a supply.

11. " Because to pray for an increase of labourers is to pray for the best interests, temporal and eternal, of a dying world."

CHAPTER VI.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

"**PREPARE** to meet thy God." Such is the emphatic counsel which God's Providence, equally with his Word, addresses to the young. This voice from the throne of God should be heard and pondered, and constantly obeyed ; for we are liable every day to be summoned into the presence of our Judge, and to have required from us a minute and particular account of all the deeds done in the body. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ." "So then, every one of us must give account of himself to God." Every human being must meet with God. At death, the disembodied spirit will stand in his immediate presence. It will appear in the character which, through life, has been put on, and in this it will stand to be judged ; and according as the individual then presents himself to the inspection of infinite purity and rectitude, so will be his final condition of happiness or misery.

The consideration of death and judgment may seem to be a gloomy subject for the young, restraining their mirth, and marring their enjoyments ; and hence is it that so many defer the consideration of it, and, amidst the plans of youth and the active pursuits of mature life, scarcely bestow on it a passing thought. Conduct of this kind must, however, be regarded as the worst species of infatuation and madness. Preparation for death is indispensably necessary for the young as well as for others. Life is always uncertain—a vapour which appears but for a moment, and then vanishes away. Death is certain ; and to the youngest, fairest, and healthiest, it may be near. To the young, the probability is much greater that they shall die soon, than that they shall live to old age. From an accurate comparison of tables of mortality, it has been ascertained that nearly *one-half* of the whole human family die before they reach the age of *eighteen* years, and that more than one-half the remainder die before they arrive at the age of *forty*. The young ought, therefore, seriously to reflect on the uncertainty

to them of life, and all its pursuits and pleasures. They should think how liable they are to be called away in the midst of their unexecuted purposes, how speedily they may be required to render an account of the talents that were entrusted to them, and of their improvement—how soon they may have to part with life, and take up their abode in eternity. Apart from the pain of dying, and from the interruption of plans and pursuits, and the dissolution of earthly relationships, which take place at death, there is much that is momentous in the termination of the present state of existence, and in the entrance into the world of spirits. The maxim of the Grecian sage¹ was, “No one should be called happy till his death.” And a wisdom infinitely higher than any which springs from this world has declared, “He that endures to the end shall be saved.” All the pleasures and enjoyments of life are illusory and deceitful, if not absolutely ruinous, which are incompatible with dying in the Lord; and that profession of religion is vain which does not last till the close of life, and which does not abide the testing trial of death and judgment. To a person of the most limited intellect, and of the least reflection, it is obvious that we are *born for eternity*. The present life is but the bud and germ of being: the future is the full fruit and maturity of human existence. Just as the soul excels the body, and the interests of eternity transcend the concerns of time, so must it be important to make provision for the new condition into which we are shortly to enter. The full and unequivocal testimony of Sacred Scripture is, that death makes no change in the moral nature or distinguishing features of character of the individual. His habits, mental and moral, remain unaffected by the change; and his active dispositions, good or evil, continue to develop themselves more fully in the state into which death introduces him. Death is simply a change of condition or place; and all that was essential to the character that has been superinduced continues, when the partnership of soul and body has been dissolved. “As the tree falls, so it will lie.” Is it not, then, of unspeakable importance to have that character now formed which will meet the approval of the Judge at his coming? Is it not most desirable, before the arrest of death, to have acquired a meetness for the society, employments, and enjoyments of the blessed, into which at death the saints are introduced? Compared with such preparation, all other purposes and works, when considered aright, must appear utterly insignificant. What is

¹ Solon.

the applause of a world, when contrasted with the wrath of an angry God? Can riches, or all the objects of earthly enjoyment, profit in the day of wrath? What will it avail to have been powerful, successful, or admired, if death finds the person unprepared, and if eternal woe will be his portion? The young should reflect on these things; and the consideration of them should urge them to receive and obey our Lord's solemn direction, "Be ye always ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

SECT. I.—*Whercin preparation for Death consists.*

It has been frequently said, that to "*learn to die well, is to learn to live well.*" It is preposterous, in the highest degree, to defer this great work till the future, by presuming upon youth and health, and in the vain expectation of years to come. While much diversity in relation to the time and outward circumstances of death may take place with the young as well as others, there are some things essential to a happy death and a blissful eternity. To be in Christ, to die in the Lord, to be a partaker of grace, and to have the graces of the Spirit in exercise—to have a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light: these are indispensable if we would be conquerors in death, and would afterwards be partakers of the joy of the Lord. If the young would reach this happy consummation, and have death, however and wherever it may reach them, "gain," they should prepare for it:—

1. *By frequent serious thought upon the end of life, and upon the change through which they are to pass in dying.* "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."¹ This is a settled Divine constitution, the fixed, unalterable purpose of the Eternal. Never was it interfered with, save in the case of two much-honoured servants of God, Enoch and Elijah; and we have no reason to think that in any subsequent instance, till the end of time, will it be again infringed. The young should habituate themselves to meditate on death, not from the morbid feeling of cherishing dark and gloomy thoughts, but to give a right tone and direction to the business of life, and to facilitate the preparation for their dissolution. From the proneness of youth to keep out of view the thought of death, and from the temptation to which the young are pecu-

¹ Hebrews ix. 27.

liarly exposed to be engrossed with objects of sense, and present earthly pursuits, to the neglect of things spiritual and eternal, they have special need to reflect betimes upon their mortality. Such reflections should mingle with all their engagements, and influence their whole disposition and conduct. It is related that Philip of Macedon, lest, amidst the engrossing cares and pomp of royalty, he should forget the condition of humanity, caused a herald to proclaim every morning before his chamber, "Remember, O king, that thou art mortal!" A similar warning voice should each day be listened to by the young. They should familiarize themselves with the thought of death, that when the messenger comes they may not be taken by surprise. This thought should be entertained, till it exert a practical and subduing influence upon the whole inner man, and upon the whole conduct. Their work in life should be such as, at death, will be approved of God, and such as will, on reviewing it, yield satisfaction to the conscience. Their state of heart and mind should be befitting their appearance in the presence of the Judge; and the consideration of laying aside what is mortal, and putting on immortality, should elevate and animate them in all duty, comfort them in all trials, and enable them to overcome the world. Reflections on death thus entertained will be as the girding up of the loins, to await the Lord's coming. The day of death will not overtake us unawares, because the work of life is, in some measure, finished. We shall be "satisfied with length of days,"¹ and be prepared to enter into the promised and expected rest of the righteous.

2. By a *lively faith exercised in Christ*, the young are prepared for death. Of the Jewish patriarchs—"the elders who obtained a good report"—it is significantly and beautifully said, "*These all died in faith.*" It had been before recorded of the same distinguished servants of God, that "*they lived in faith.*" This holy principle was the grand distinction of their character, that which, like the seal on the plastic wax, impressed its own permanent likeness upon their minds and actions. The same connection still obtains, and it may be safely affirmed, that it never will be broken. A life of faith will end in a death of faith; and his warfare and work finished, which was performed in humble reliance on the Saviour, the Christian soldier shall receive "the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul." The faith which is saving has Christ the Lord for its great object, as He is its blessed Author and Finisher. In Him is

¹ Psalm xci. 16; margin.

laid up all that the soul needs ; in Him are deposited "all treasures of wisdom and knowledge." By faith we embrace Him as "all and in all ;" in Him we have "righteousness and strength ;" and He "of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption."

By faith we look to Him and are saved ; we come to Him weary and heavy laden, and obtain rest ; we lean upon Him for strength and support ; we commit our spirits and all our interests into his hands, and out of his fulness we receive grace for grace. The entertainment of such views, and the growth of such principles, are, in the highest degree, important and salutary in life, and for death it is the grand preparation. Jesus, our blessed Lord and Redeemer, has "the keys of hell and of death." In his own death, He conquered the destroyer ; and when He rose and ascended to glory, "He led captivity captive." When as a conqueror He fell, He achieved a victory for his people over all evil. He "destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, even the devil." "He was once offered to bear the sins of many ; and unto them that look for Him"—that is, believe on Him—"shall He appear the second time, without sin unto salvation."¹ Having Himself trod the dark valley, having endured the agony of dying, and encountered all that can render death terrible, He is fitted to sustain and comfort his people in death, and to give them the victory. His assured promise is, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself ; that where I am, there ye may be also."² What can be so supporting and joyful as this ? If Jordan was driven back in view of the ark of the covenant, and when the priests' feet touched the waters, and Israel passed over in safety, how much greater are the safety and triumph of those who have lived a life of faith upon the Son of God, when they come to die ? The Friend in whom they have confided will not then forsake them. When they pass through the waters, He will be with them. He will support them under weakness and pain ; lighten the dark valley with his presence and glory ; swallow up death for them in victory, and minister to them "an abundant entrance into his everlasting kingdom." The principal acts of faith with which the servant of God is familiar in life,—such as fleeing to Christ as a refuge, relying upon his power and faithfulness, drawing out of his fulness, and committing the soul to Him,—constitute the grand preparation for death. The merciful Saviour cannot fail any that trust in Him. What his people commit to Him,

¹ Hebrews ix. 28.

² John xiv. 2.

He will assuredly keep till the day of his glorious appearance. Death will introduce the spirit of the believer into the glorious presence of Him who led and fed him all his life long ; and faith, exercised in difficulty, darkness, and conflict, will issue in everlasting triumph and unmingled felicity : "*When I awake, I shall be satisfied with thy likeness ; I shall see thy face in righteousness.*"¹ How excellent a life of faith ! how blissful its termination !

3. The young make preparation for death *by cultivating universal holiness*. Faith that is saving "purifies the heart," and so does the hope of salvation. "Every man that hath this hope purifies himself, as God is pure." This is, indeed, the proper work of the great principle, which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."² It discerns the enormous evil of sin, and excites a keen and thorough hatred of it. It beholds the matchless beauty of holiness, and delights in it as its proper element. Whoever in faith names the name of Christ will depart from iniquity. Moral purity is indispensable to happiness in dying. The sting of death is sin. That which torments the mind in the retrospect, in the hour of dissolution, is the bitterness of former transgressions ; and that which rends it with inconceivable agonies in the prospect, is the thought of condemnation at the judgment-seat, because of sin unpardoned. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." This is the fixed and unalterable law of Heaven. Into the presence of Infinite Purity, there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, or causeth abomination, or is unclean. The cultivation of holy dispositions, and the practice of holy actions, are the surest and best preparation for a happy death. Thus the soul becomes assimilated to the mansions of perfect purity, and puts on a meetness for the employments of the blessed, and the exalted pleasures which are at God's right hand. It is attracted to the upper world as its kindred element, and rejoices, amidst the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, to put on the house which is in heaven. "The pure in heart shall see God." Sprinkled by atoning blood, and transformed by the renewing of the Spirit, they are prepared for receiving the unspeakable discoveries of the Divine glory ; and this vision is to them *beatific*—the endless source of inconceivable felicity. Nothing but a holy character will abide the trial of death ; none but holy works will then meet with approval. Holiness, the meetness for future felicity, must be

¹ Psalm xvii. 15.

² Hebrews xi. 1.

assumed here ; in its very nature it is progressive and expansive ; and if we would possess it, we must be active in its cultivation. The saints who are admitted to glory have "washed their robes and made them white." While "the blood of the Lamb" is graciously provided for them as a laver of cleansing, and the blessed Spirit is the great Agent of purification ; in sanctification, believers become "co-workers with God." They *wash their own robes*, that they may be clean. Their thoughts, desires, duties, whole walk, all that distinguishes them, are these "robes," originally defiled, and liable continually to contract new stains. These they bring daily to the Great Fountain of purification. The blood of the Lamb is efficacious to remove all defilement, and to cleanse from all sin. Habitual application to it will disengage the heart from earthly objects, and will fix the affections on things above. Let the young earnestly seek after an increased measure of holiness. Let them use the Word and ordinances to promote purity of life. Let them value, and fervently desire, perfection in holiness ; and thus will death, however it may come, be to them great gain. All imperfection for ever gone, they shall be holy, as God is holy ; and together with perfect purity, they shall enjoy inconceivable and endless felicity.

4. *Abounding in the work of the Lord* is an eminent preparation for death. The faithful servant receives his reward when his labour is ended. Death introduces him to the rest that remains for the people of God. Rest implies the cessation of labour ; and the holy, blissful rest that the saints enjoy in passing out of the body, carries in it the idea, that, up till the time of their exit, they have been actively and devotedly employed in the work of their exalted Master. The commencement of heavenly felicity is the approving sentence of the Judge, "WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT." If we would hear this joy-inspiring declaration addressed to us, we must aim to be always abounding in the work of the Lord. Sometimes, even when the thought of death is not present, this will be found the best preparation for the great change. If talents are faithfully expended, so as to obtain an increase, we shall be ready to account for them when our Lord cometh. The watchful servant is pronounced blessed when his Master calls him to go forth to meet Him ; the slothful, on the other hand, is declared to be "wicked," and is dismissed to endless misery. Devotedness to Christ is itself a principal element of happiness in life, and is the grand preparation for

the highest happiness at its termination. We must continue the warfare till the end, and the victory will reward all; we must finish our course, and the crown of righteousness will be compensation sufficient for all losses, trials, difficulties. Heaven will be enhanced by its being rest after labour, satisfaction and felicity after tribulation and anxiety. The young should see that they are in reality employed in the Lord's service; they should aim always to abound in the work of the Lord, and they should seek to be found in it to the end. The service of God will itself purify and elevate the heart, stamp dignity on the pursuits of life, and prepare the individual for the higher work of the upper sanctuary. Following the counsel of a celebrated Jansenist, the young "*should study to labour to the end; eternity will be long enough to rest.*" The Divine direction and promise should be taken as at once the motto of the conduct, and the pledge of a blissful reward: "Be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life."¹

5. *Waiting for the Lord's coming* is, finally, a chief preparation for a happy death. The Scriptures hold out the coming of Christ as to the Christian the joyful termination of all his trials, the end of his faith, the consummation of his highest hopes. This is the beginning of his glorious recompense of reward, the morning-dawn of his state of unspeakable and unending bliss. The Saviour assures his people that He will come again—in affliction and trial, to turn their sorrow into joy; at death, to receive them to Himself, that where He is, there they may be also. This is ever represented as the fulfilment of the believer's most enlarged expectations, the completion of his character and felicity. He sees his Saviour now through a glass darkly; he shall then behold Him face to face. While here, by reason of imperfect vision, his views are beclouded, his sanctification incomplete, his joys interrupted, and his victories partial. When, however, that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. The Saviour's presence will dispel darkness, vanquish all enemies, and fill the heart with unutterable joys. It will realize to the believer all his fervent desires, and gloriously complete the work of grace in his heart. When absent from the body, he will be present with the Lord. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."² Such being the high purposes to be accomplished by Christ's coming, is it to be thought strange that to the saints it should be a subject of frequent

¹ Revelation ii. 10.

² 1 John iii. 2.

meditation and earnest expectation? They are represented as loving his appearance, waiting for his coming from heaven, waiting for his manifestation, and looking for and hasting to the day of the Lord. They are exhibited as standing "with their loins girded," and their lights burning, and like men who wait for their Lord, when He will come. Their love to Christ may be tested by the presence or absence, the strength or weakness, of this feeling. Just as we desire the presence of a beloved object, and regard with interest his return, so when the Saviour, the beloved of the soul, is absent, the thought of his coming will be frequently entertained, and the desire of it cherished. So many and so excellent are the purposes subserved to the Christian by the Saviour's coming, that, in a right frame of heart, it cannot but be to him a subject of the deepest interest and most fervent affection. The revelation of his ineffable glory, the termination of the believer's conflict with sin and all evil, perfection of character, the enjoyment of the highest felicity—these are the immediate blessed consequences of meeting with the Saviour in death. Into his glorious presence, the dissolution of the tie that unites soul and body will introduce the faithful servant. The Saviour himself will lighten the dark valley, and dry up the river of death; and his glory, bursting upon the disembodied spirit, will usher it into "fulness of joy" and everlasting pleasures.

Waiting for the Saviour's appearance implies steadfast belief in its certainty and nearness, loving expectation of it, and daily preparation for it. We should order the business of life, so as to have all prepared for "the coming of the Son of man." This will overcome the dread of dissolution, render a dying scene happy, and minister an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of Christ. It is related of the eminently pious Janeway, that when a foolish report prevailed through the neighbourhood wherein he resided, that *Doomsday* was at hand, he said with much solemnity and evident joy, "And what if it were already come? I protest before God, I would rejoice with all my heart; and the thought of that day, and of my appearing with my Lord at his coming, has often filled me with greater happiness than all things in the world besides." Thus let the young wait for the coming of the Lord. Thus they will "die daily." Thus shall they be enabled to say, with fervent aspirations of heart, when they stand on the brink of the unseen world, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus;" and when the Saviour whom they have loved and served receives them

to his blissful presence, they shall exclaim with wrapt wonder and astonishment, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."¹

SECT. II.—*Death of a Pious Youth.*

The young, to whom these counsels are addressed, should always keep in mind one solemn consideration—they may be cut off in the morning of life. They may be called to take up their lot in eternity before they have reached the years of manhood, and while occupied in forming plans for future labour or enjoyment. Many of the human family die in youth; and those to whom these words come, should frequently reflect that there is a strong probability that this may be their condition. Instead of repeating what has been elsewhere advanced concerning the importance of ordering the life so as to be prepared for death, whenever it may come, we present the happy death of a pious youth, removed before he has been long in the conflict, to enjoy the blessedness of complete and everlasting victory. We are too prone to associate with death what is gloomy and distressful; and when the person who is taken away is a godly, promising youth, we are apt to regard his removal as a subject of painful regret. The endeared friends, from whose circle he has been separated, mourn his loss as to them irretrievable. The expectations that were fondly cherished of extended usefulness from his life, are doomed to disappointment; and to our weak and limited vision, the Church and the world appear to suffer much by the removal of one who was fitted to confer on them many benefits, just as he was entering upon his career of active benevolence. We speak of such a dispensation as *mysterious*, and we feel as if by it some great calamity had been inflicted. But in all this we overlook the abundant honour and unspeakable blessedness which are conferred upon him whose departure we deplore. Our loss is his unspeakable gain; and whatever of trial or Divine displeasure his death may be to survivors, to himself it is the possession of endless felicity.

Besides the ordinary privileges that are connected with the death of the righteous, there are some that are peculiar to the youthful servant of God. He is greatly honoured by being so

¹ Isaiah xxv. 9.

soon called to the service of the upper sanctuary. His translation to glory speedily follows his calling ; his regeneration is succeeded by his advancement to the stature of "a perfect man" in Christ ; and scarcely had he enlisted as a soldier in the army of the Captain of salvation, and girded on the armour of righteousness, when he becomes a crowned conqueror, and grasps the palm of completed victory. The spiritual discoveries made to him in the morning of the new birth, usher him into the perfect day. The glass through which he saw darkly is laid aside, and, instead of it, there is now full-face vision. The warm youthful desires that went out after Christ and salvation obtain their highest gratification ; and the excellence of character after which the aspirant to glory incessantly longed, and for which he laboured, is fully realized. "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." To "depart and be with Christ," the believing youth feels to be "far better." For a time he may lawfully have indulged the love of life. He desired to live that he might serve God. His heart was wedded to the work of his exalted Master ; and even when the hand of affliction is laid upon him, and there are intimations given him of death, he may have wished to be restored, that he might see more of the Lord's loving-kindness in the land of the living ; that he might be instrumental, to a greater degree, in advancing the Redeemer's glory. When, however, he is made sensible that his days on earth are numbered, he is enabled to rejoice in the prospect of dissolution, and to triumph in the hope of glory. He knows that the "pleasures which are at God's right hand" in heaven, vastly surpass any enjoyments of which he could partake here ; and the service in the Father's house above, is inconceivably more exalted than any which he could render on earth. There is no night there. There is no darkness, no interruption of labour, no pain, fear, or anything that can mar satisfaction, or diminish delight. The spirits of saints made perfect serve God day and night. "I saw no temple therein : for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." Material means of worship are gone ; there is no special place where the Divine presence may be enjoyed, for it is everywhere in the world of glory ; there is no restriction in holy services, for it is a perpetual "Sabbath-keeping" for the people of God ; and the services of devotion are no longer distinct and separate. The whole man is engaged in active spiritual work, and God's

¹ Revelation xxi. 22.

glory is seen to be all in all. God is fully manifested. His blissful presence is continually enjoyed. The fulness of the Godhead is seen in Christ, the Elder Brother. Perfect communion with God is realized, and the highest and holiest desires receive their amplest gratification.

The near view of such blessedness supports the youthful believer when flesh and heart are failing, and cheer his spirit in the hour of dissolution. Death is unstinged. Mortality is swallowed up of life. The promised presence of Christ, now actually enjoyed, dispels the gloom and terror of the valley of the shadow of death. "At evening time there is light," causing heartfelt joy within, and gladdening the heart with the prospect of being admitted to full and wondrous felicity. The dying youth "knows whom he has believed," and he is assured of his safety. His soul is filled with peace that surpasses understanding, and he is animated by the earnest and foretastes of future glory. He breathes the fragrance of heaven; and as he speaks in the language of Canaan, of the blessed object of faith, of the excellence of faith and holy obedience, and of the sure and everlasting mercies of the Lord, his heart is enlarged; and sorrowing friends hardly know whether to weep for their loss, or to exult in his felicity, now almost complete.

The struggle is at length over. The youthful believer falls asleep in Jesus, and attending angels convey his sanctified soul to mansions of glory. Earth and its scenes, conflicts, cares, trials, are for ever gone; and a crown, a kingdom, an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, are now his unchangeable and eternal portion. Absent from the body, he is present with the Lord. The joy of actual fruition far exceeds all that hope could anticipate, or imagination, in its loftiest flight, could ever reach. Welcomed to the heavenly rest by holy angels that surround the throne, and by the spirits of glorified saints that have gone before, and, above all, by the Lord of that country, his own exalted and much-loved Master, in conscious and transporting happiness his former trials are forgotten. His saintly character is fully matured. He is numbered with the spirits of just men made perfect; and he enters upon the ennobling employments and enjoyments of heaven with enraptured wonder, and admiration, and delight. Waving his palm of victory in honour of the Redeemer, and arrayed in white raiment, he is advanced to serve before the throne. He shall go no more out. He has entered on a career of most dignified service, and of unbounded and endless felicity. "THE LAMB WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF

THE THRONE SHALL FEED THEM, AND SHALL LEAD THEM TO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATER, AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES." In the view of a death so triumphant, and of such a glorious recompense of reward, should we not resolve to follow Christ fully? Ought we not to say, in the fervent desire and resolution of the heart, "*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*"¹

As exemplifying the power of true religion in sustaining in death, we subjoin a few instances of the sanctified and happy departure of servants of God, who were almost all removed early, having eminently served their generation by the will of God.

The case of the truly illustrious Dr Payson of America may be noticed as an instance of a servant of God, whose death was most joyful and triumphant, and whose works will long be a blessing in the Church. The son of a clergyman, his early conversion, there is reason to think, was the fruit of parental fidelity. In the prime of youth, he surrendered his heart and all his faculties to the service of the Master whom he had chosen; and his was a life of eminent prayerfulness, successful effort, and devotedness to the great objects of the Christian ministry. His death, at the comparatively early age of thirty-eight, most triumphant, notwithstanding severe sufferings, exhibits the high rewards of youthful devotedness, and discovers the incomparable joys of true religion.

"I feel desirous," he remarked from his bed of pain, "that you might see that the religion I have preached can support me in death. You know that I have many ties which bind me to earth; a family to whom I am strongly attached, and a people whom I love almost as well; but the other world acts as a much stronger magnet, and draws my heart away from this. Death comes every night, and stands by my bedside in the form of terrible convulsions, every one of which threatens to separate the soul from the body. These continue to grow worse and worse, until every bone is almost dislocated with pain, leaving me with the certainty that I shall have it all to endure again the next night. Yet while my body is thus tortured, the soul is perfectly, perfectly happy and peaceful—more happy than I can possibly express to you. I lie here, and feel these convulsions extending higher and higher, without the least uneasiness; but my soul is filled with joy unspeakable. I seem to swim in a flood of glory which God pours down upon me. And I know, I *know* that my happiness is but begun; I cannot doubt that it will last for ever."

¹ Numbers xxiii. 10.

"A young man just about to leave this world exclaimed, 'The battle's fought! the battle's fought! the battle's fought! but the victory is lost for ever!' But I can say, 'The battle's fought, and the victory is won! the victory is won for ever. I am going to bathe in an ocean of purity, and benevolence, and happiness, to all eternity.'"

A friend said to him, "I presume it is no longer incredible to you, if ever it was, that martyrs should rejoice, and praise God in the flames and on the rack." "No," he said, "I can easily believe it. I have suffered twenty times, yes, to speak within bounds, twenty times as much as I could in being burnt at the stake, while my joy in God so abounded, as to render my sufferings not only tolerable but welcome. *The sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.*" At another time, "God is literally now my all in all. While He is present with me, no event can in the least diminish my happiness; and were the whole world at my feet trying to minister to my comfort, they could not add one drop to the cup. It seems as if the promise, 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,' was already fulfilled in me; as it respects tears of sorrow, I have no tears to shed now, but those of love, and joy, and thankfulness."

About a month before his departure, he thus writes: "Were I to adopt the figurative language of Bunyan, I should date this letter from the land of Beulah, of which I have been for some weeks a happy inhabitant. The celestial city is full in my view. Its glories beam upon me, its odours are wafted to me, its sounds strike upon my ears, and its spirit is breathed into my heart. Nothing separates me from it but the river of death, which now appears but as an insignificant rill, that may be crossed at a single step, whenever God shall give permission. 'The Sun of Righteousness has gradually been drawing nearer and nearer, appearing larger and brighter as He approached; and now He fills the whole hemisphere, pouring forth a flood of glory, in which I seem to float as an insect in the beams of the sun; exulting, yet almost trembling, when I gaze on this excessive brightness, and wondering, with unutterable wonder, that God should deign to shine upon a sinful worm.'"

The Rev. James Hervey, who likewise died in comparatively early life, when speaking of his dissolution, said, "But do not think that I am afraid to die: I assure you I am not. I know what my Saviour hath done for me, and I long to be gone." To his medical attendant, who advised him to spare himself, he

replied, "No, no; you tell me that I have but a few moments to live: O let me spend them in adoring our great Redeemer! How thankful am I for death, as it is the passage through which I pass to the Lord and giver of eternal life. Oh! welcome, welcome, death! Thou mayest well be reckoned among the treasures of the Christian. *To live is Christ, but to die is gain.* Here, Dr Stonehouse, is my cordial. What are all the cordials given to support the dying, in comparison with that which arises from the promises of salvation by Christ? This, this supports me." About two hours before his departure he said, "The great conflict is over; now, all is done;" after which he scarcely spoke any words intelligibly, excepting now and then, "Precious salvation."

The devoted Christian philanthropist Howard said to Admiral Priestman, a few days before his death, in a distant land, "You endeavour to divert my mind from dwelling on death, but I entertain very different sentiments. *Death has no terrors for me; it is an event I always look forward to with cheerfulness, if not with pleasure.*" The ground of this cheerfulness in the view of dissolution was, doubtless, the declaration which he requested might be the only inscription on his tomb, "CHRIST IS MY HOPE."

The dying sayings of the eminent and pious Halyburton are full of the Christian's joyful confidence and triumph in death. To some around his bed of affliction he said, "The greatest kindness I can show you is to commend serious religion to you. Now get acquaintance with God. The little acquaintance I have had with God within these *two days* has been better than ten thousand times the *pains* I have *all my life* been about religion." In a letter to his nephew, dictated shortly before his decease, he urges him to "make earnest of religion, and not to rest content with a dead, dry, barren profession. I can tell you, that *since I came to this bed of languishing, I have found a full proof that religion is a real, useful, noble, and profitable thing.* . . . I never found so much goodness when I was in health and prosperity, as I find now in sickness and languishing." Subsequently he said, "My bones are riving through my skin, and yet all my bones are praising Him. O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! I am now a witness for Christ, and for the reality of religion. . . . I have peace in the midst of pain; and Oh! how much of that I have had for a time past! My peace has been like a river—not a discomposed thought." When draw

ing near his end, one remarked to him, "Blessed are they that die in the Lord." He replied, "When I fall so low that I cannot speak, I'll show you a sign of triumph, if I am able." And when he could no longer speak, he lifted up his hands, clapped them in token of victory, and shortly after departed.

Dr Doddridge wrote shortly before his decease: "It is a blessed thing to live above the fear of death; and, I praise God, I fear it not. The most distressing nights to this frail body, have been as the beginning of heaven to my soul. God hath, as it were, let heaven down to me, in those nights of weakness and waking." Nearer the time of his joyful dismissal, he said several times to Mrs Doddridge, "I cannot express to you what a morning I have had; such delightful and transporting views of the heavenly world is my Father now indulging me with as never words can express."

The godly Samuel Rutherford, a few hours before his departure, said, "I am a sinful and miserable man; but I stand at the best pass that ever a miserable man stood at: 'Christ is mine, and I am his.'" The illustrious James Renwick, the last of Scotland's covenanted martyrs, who obtained his glorious crown at the early age of twenty-six, on the day of his execution said, in the presence of his mother and sisters, when giving thanks after some refreshment: "O Lord, thou hast brought me within two hours of eternity, and this is no matter of terror to me, more than if I were to lie down on a bed of roses; nay, through grace to thy praise, I may say I never had the fear of death since I came to this prison; but from the place where I was taken, I could have gone very composedly to the scaffold. Oh! how can I contain this, to be within two hours of the crown of glory!" His last testimony concludes with these words: "I may say to his praise, that I have found his cross sweet and lovely to me; for I have had many joyful hours, and not a fearful thought since I came to prison. He hath strengthened me to outbrave man, and to outface death, and I am now longing for the joyful hour of my dissolution. Farewell, beloved sufferers and followers of the Lamb! . . . Farewell, sweet societies and desirable general meetings! Farewell, night-wanderings, in cold and weariness for Christ! Farewell, sweet Bible, and the preaching of the Gospel! Farewell, sun, moon, and stars, and all sublunary things! Farewell, conflicts with a body of sin and death! Welcome, scaffold, for precious Christ! welcome, heavenly Jerusalem! welcome, innumerable company of angels! welcome, General Assembly and

Church of the Firstborn ! welcome, crown of glory, white robes, and song of Moses and the Lamb ! and above all, welcome, O thou blessed Trinity and one God ! O Eternal One, I commit my soul into thy eternal rest."

David Brainerd, the most prayerful and devoted of modern missionaries, when worn out in the prime of life by his exertions for the conversion of the heathen, speaks thus of his hope in death :—

" *Monday, Feb. 11.*—I was in the most solemn frame of mind that almost I ever remember to have experienced. I know not that death ever appeared more real to me, or that ever I saw myself in the condition of a dead corpse, laid out and dressed for a lodging in the silent grave, so evidently as at this time. And yet I felt exceedingly comfortable ; my mind was composed and calm, and death appeared without a sting. I think I never felt such a universal mortification to all created objects as now." At a later period, he writes in his diary : " Oh, how sweet were the thoughts of death to me at this time ! Oh, how I longed to be with Christ, to be employed in the glorious work of angels, and with an angel's freedom, vigour, and delight ! And yet, how willing was I to stay a while on earth, that I might do something, if the Lord pleased, for his interest in the world." *

Who would not say, in pondering such records of the peace and joy of death of approved servants of Christ, " BLESSED ARE THE DEAD THAT DIE IN THE LORD ? "

SECT. III.—*Final condition of a Child of the Kingdom cast out.*

The death of the impenitent and disobedient is, in any view, fearful. " The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." They are cast out into outer darkness. They fall " into the hands of an angry God." They go to inhabit unquenchable fire ; and pain and torment without alleviation, and wrath without mixture, become their sure and everlasting portion. But while death under the curse is inexpressibly terrible to any human beings, to the young who received religious instruction,

* The account of a number of these cases of happy death are given in a useful little volume, entitled *Lessons for the Living from the Experience of the Dying*, by William Blatch, published by Mr Johnstone, Edinburgh. For the selected narratives of the deaths of eminent Christians, and of leading infidels, which it contains, it deserves to be attentively read by the young.

and were in infancy dedicated to God, it is invested with circumstances of peculiar terror. Our Lord, who has authority to execute judgment, and who fully knows the power of God's wrath, employs language of the most dread import on this subject: "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹ "The first shall be last." These words imply that a special doom awaits the careless and unbelieving, who neglected or contemned the precious means of salvation, and that whatever degrees of misery in the future world are in reserve for the ungodly, the lowest is for those who, though dedicated to God in infancy, and the subjects of faithful parental instructions, yet misimprove the day of their merciful visitation, and walk forwardly in the way of their heart. The ways of departure from God are many and diversified. Some of the young who perish for ever may have early cast behind their back all good instructions, and launched away into the paths of profligacy and ungodliness. Others may have only been known as neglecting religious duties, without being remarkable for any peculiar vice. They may have lived without God, and without Christ in the world, while they assumed the mask of a religious profession, without any real change of heart, or any principle of grace within. In all these cases, the arrest of death is exceedingly fearful, and the final condition is miserable beyond description or conception.

The young person who has entered on this fatal course—who, neglecting religion, rejoices in his youth, and walks in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes—should always consider that his thoughtlessness will not stay the arrest of death. He has no lease of life. He may be cut off suddenly; and any day, when he is busied in the pursuit of pleasure, or of earthly things, it may be said to him, "Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee." In the midst of his heedlessness, the mandate that seals his doom may be issued forth, the messenger of death may receive his commission, and he may not stay the summons. A mortal disease lays its hand upon his frame, and triumphs over every attempted remedy. The mind, if conscious, reviewing the past, has only the appalling remembrance of opportunities and privileges misimproved, or of sins committed; and, anticipating the future, sees only before

¹ Matthew viii. 11, 12.

a certain fearful looking for of judgment. If wandering or disturbed, it is shut out from all sympathy and communion with anxious and weeping friends that surround the bed of death, and rendered inaccessible to all religious instruction and comfort that they might administer. Youthful strength is speedily prostrated, youthful beauty is turned into corruption. In the fearful struggles of parting humanity, the soul finds no rest—all refuge fails. If aroused to a momentary concern about salvation, it is sought too late—"As they went to buy, the door was shut."¹ The day of opportunity is spent and passed for ever. The despairing cry of the fainting and failing spirit is, "THE HARVEST IS PAST, AND THE SUMMER IS ENDED, AND I AM NOT SAVED."² At length the countenance is changed, and the youthful sufferer is sent away: but whither—O whither? "*What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?*"³ No language can speak, or imagination conceive, half its horrors. Evil spirits, its tempters, henceforth to be its tormentors, receive the disembodied spirit, to conduct it away to endless sorrows. It appears at the tribunal of its offended Judge, and receives there the sentence of its final doom. The dread words—"Depart from me, ye cursed"—awaken unspeakable and undying remorse within, and light up fires that never can be quenched. It is sent away to tenant everlasting misery: but the greatness and intolerable nature of that misery no language of man or angel can fully declare.

Without dwelling at length on a theme which is too solemn and awful for description or utterance, we may merely notice a few circumstances concerning the state at death, and the future misery of impenitent youth, which may serve to exhibit the fearfulness of their condition:—

First. *They will be called to a most strict and particular account, and judged for all the deeds done in the body.* "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."⁴ "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."⁵ When the Lord of these servants will come to reckon with them, an account must be rendered of all the talents that were intrusted to them. The sins of youth will be brought to light, the most secret thoughts

¹ Mat. xxv. 10.

² 1 Pet. iv. 17.

³ Eccles. xi. 9.

⁴ Jeremiah viii. 20.

⁵ Eccles. xii. 14.

and actions manifested in the brightness of noon-day. Ways of ungodliness and folly will be fully exposed and openly condemned. Talents misimproved will ensure rejection and punishment. The slothful servant, who hid, instead of improving his talent,—who is not charged with squandering it, but only of not laying it out for his Master's honour,—is pronounced wicked, and is sent away to outer darkness. The character will then be unmasked; and in what fearful deformity must that appear which was never changed? The Lord, the Judge, will then *mark iniquity*; and who shall stand? Let the young, who are now inconsiderate and thoughtless, ponder how they shall stand in judgment: "To whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?"¹

Secondly. *God cannot but be greatly displeased with them.* All sin is in God's sight "the abominable thing" which his "soul hates." Evil cannot dwell with Him; nor shall fools stand in his sight. But the sins of the young, who were baptized in his great name, and who were the subjects of Christian instruction, and who yet remain impenitent, are particularly aggravated, and must incur the largest share of Divine indignation and vengeance. They are sins against light. They have been committed amidst abundant privileges, mercies, and warnings. They imply a fearful slighting of the Divine goodness, contempt of his authority, and open and impious rebellion against Him. Besides disobedience to God, they contained in them disregard to parents, and ministers, and means of grace; and they are often the means of seducing others into sin, and of hardening them in courses of ungodliness. Shall not the Lord be avenged on such as commit these sins? Like the idle shepherds whom He threatens to cut off, God declares of the young who, having received a religious education, remain careless, "My soul loathed them, and their soul abhorred me."² They slighted all good instruction, and rejected his ways, and He casts them away as objects of his special vengeance. They are spued out of his mouth, and become a terror to themselves and all around them.

Thirdly. *Their punishment is retributive.* God awards them as their iniquities deserve. He gives them according as they have acted towards Him. Their habitual language was, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thee." The most fearful part of the commencement of their torment will be the sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed!"

¹ Isaiah x. 3.² Zechariah xi. 8.

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." All that constitutes future misery may be said to be retributive. With the froward, the Lord shows Himself froward. They loved darkness rather than light; and He sends them away to outer darkness. They loved transgressors, and with them is their portion for ever. The tares are bound in bundles, and are cast into a furnace of fire. They contemned God, and were disobedient. He despises their image, and appoints tribulation and wrath, indignation and woe, to every soul of man that doeth evil. How tremendously awful will be the sinner's condition, when, for all the evil that he has done, God visits him, and causes his transgression to come upon his own head?

Fourthly. *The lost creature will be fully conscious of his miserable condition, and that through all eternity.* Memory will be clear, and conscience, once stupified, will be thoroughly awakened. The "worm that never dies" will gnaw for ever. while unquenchable fire will scorch without intermission. The anguish of lost sinners will be increased, and their torments aggravated by the distinct remembrance of all the privileges which they abused, and of all the opportunities which they misimproved. They will recollect with bitterness for ever, how near was brought to them the offer of mercy—what prayers and pleadings they contemned—the sins they committed, and the wondrous goodness that they slighted and trampled under foot. The remembrance of these things will add tenfold horrors to their misery. Objects are joyful or painful by contrast; and how painful and overpowering must be the contrast between the misery of the damned, and the instances of Divine long-suffering, compassion, and goodness which were shown them on earth!

Finally. *Their sufferings will be without alleviation.* It will be wrath without mixture, torment without end. There is not "a drop of water to cool their tongue." In the pit of woe, God's mercy is clean gone, and "He has forgotten to be gracious." The day of long-suffering and sparing mercy has fully expired. The outcast sinner has fallen into the hands of an angry God. He has become the victim of inflexible justice. He lies down in torment, and wrath to the utmost is his portion for ever. The condemned sinner will suffer all that it is possible for a guilty creature to endure, consistent with the preservation of his existence. Even existence itself will be intolerable. His lot is in "outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." He is cast away into fire

"prepared for the devil and his angels," as if only the dread punishment allotted to rebel spirits were adequate to express the Divine indignation against impenitent sinners of the human family. *Eternal death* is his fearful doom. He dies one moment, as a prelude to his dying the next, and so on through ages of endless duration. But who can declare these unspeakable horrors? Let the thoughtless and impenitent youth now lay them to heart. Let them flee from the "wrath to come."

"There in utter darkness, far
Remote, I beings saw, forlorn in woe,
Burning continually, yet unconsumed.
And there were groans that ended not, and sighs
That always sighed, and tears that ever wept
And ever fell, but not in mercy's sight.
And still I heard these wretched beings curse
Almighty God, and curse the Lamb, and curse
The earth, the resurrection morn, and seek,
And ever vainly seek, for utter death.
And from above, the thunders answered still—
Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not."

Pollok's Course of Time, b. v.

SECT. IV.—*The devoted Youth admitted to his glorious reward in Heaven.*

When, by faith, Moses relinquished the honours and pleasures of a court, and refusing to be "called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," cast in his lot with an oppressed and degraded people, it is said, "He had *respect to the recompense of the reward.*" This was doubtless, in part, the Divine blessing which is bestowed on the righteous in this life; but it was chiefly the blessedness reserved for the saints in the kingdom of heaven. This includes deliverance from all evil—the fulfilment of the highest desires—a full compensation for all privations, toils, sufferings, that are endured in the way of duty—and the realization of all delightful and ennobling prospects. Divine grace revealed this blessed portion to the heart of Moses, and gave him the earnest of its enjoyment. The effects were powerful and lasting. Compared with the inheritance of the saints, earthly treasures appeared to him of no value. A state of contempt and affliction with God's people seemed every way preferable to all the pleasures of sin; and even the worst part of a true profession—"the reproach of Christ" outweighed the revenues of an earthly kingdom. The glory

of the reward which he deliberately chose, and to which he looked forward, eclipsed all worldly splendour—animated him in the most arduous and perilous services—imparted to him eminent meekness under great provocations; and finally enraptured his heart, as he beheld the land of promise from the mountain where he died, and rendered his departure triumphant and glorious. But whatever were the joys of anticipation to Moses, those of full fruition inconceivably surpassed them. The “recompense of the reward” was to him greater than all that faith had ever previously discerned—it vastly transcended all that he had heretofore conceived.

Thus also “the crown of righteousness,” which is conferred upon the Christian when he has finished his work on earth, and as he enters his rest in heaven, far exceeds all that he could ever conceive of, while engaged in his pilgrimage. It is an exceeding great, even an eternal weight of glory; a glory which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. A steadfast belief and distinct apprehension of this blessed reward is a powerful motive to holy obedience. Believers, as risen with Christ, are enjoined to set their affections on things above. They are assured of a glorious rest after labour. When Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they shall appear with Him in glory. The excellency of primitive Christianity was displayed in the firm confidence and lively expectation of future bliss. This impelled the first Christians to the most energetic exertions, and sustained them under the greatest privations and sufferings. This enabled them to rejoice in tribulation, and to triumph in death. “They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a greater and enduring inheritance.”¹

Christians in our own day will generally be found to be devoted, and to “shine as lights in the world,” according as they seek those things that are above, as they lay up treasure in heaven, and have their hearts there also. That we may present a constraining motive to holy exertion, and to the cultivation of the Christian temper, we notice, in conclusion, some views of the final condition in glory of the faithful servant when his service on earth is ended, and he has taken his place among the “spirits of just men made perfect.”

We will suppose that he is removed in youth, that he is called away early from a sphere of usefulness, and that he

¹ Hebrews x. 34.

enjoys the reward of glory, after a brief term of service on earth. Whatever sorrow the death of a youthful saint may occasion to endeared friends, whatever fond anticipations were cherished of his future and extensive usefulness, and how great soever may be the regret entertained, that a fair flower of promise was nipped early, death is to him great *gain*, and the immediate and eternal consequences of death are most joyful and blessed. Not to speak of the delight of the sanctified spirit, in having attained that excellence of character which was to him the subject of earnest aspiration and frequent intense study, not to mention the overpowering and enraptured surprise with which the conscious spirit enters its blissful rest—the hour of greatest weakness being succeeded by the highest enjoyment—we advert only to a few views of the ingredients of future happiness, which appear specially adapted to animate and elevate the young soldier of Christ, and which exhibit the pre-eminent excellence of his eternal portion.

First. *It will be a great recompense for all his sufferings, a blessed reward for all his service.* There is a reward for the righteous even on earth. In keeping the Divine precepts there is a great reward; but still the reward in heaven so far excels any that could be enjoyed here, that it is represented by such terms as almost seem to exhibit it as the only reward. It is a “crown of life”—“the palm” of conquest. Believers are “kings” on earth, but they are not *crowned* here. They are even now “conquerors, and more than conquerors;” but they obtain the palm only when their warfare is ended, and the victory complete. In this life, they are assured of a “hundred-fold more,” instead of all they forego for Christ; but in the world to come their reward is “life everlasting.” This honour and enjoyment, which will vastly transcend all that eye could see or heart conceive, is designed to compensate for all the privations and trials which Zion’s travellers endure in their way to heaven. There God is, in the fullest sense, his people’s “EXCEEDING GREAT REWARD.”* He is their upmaking, soul-satisfying, and everlasting portion. The servant that faithfully occupied his “one pound” receives authority over *ten cities*. Even the cup of cold water given to the least of Christ’s servants for his sake will be rewarded. God will never forget the work of faith and labour of love of his saints. How blissful their state, when all that they have done and suffered in Christ’s cause will be remembered and rewarded! Their

* Genesis xv. 1.

reward will greatly excel all that is earthly. It will be most gracious—inconceivably surpassing all their deserts—and it will excite their wonder and admiration for ever. God is not “ashamed to be called their God, because He hath prepared for them a city.” “An everlasting kingdom” will be given them, instead of some temporary possessions or honours which they relinquished on earth; a mansion in the Father’s house, in place of their wandering condition and poverty here; a seat upon the throne with Christ, instead of contempt and sufferings, which they once endured for his name’s sake. As they receive this reward from the hand of their exalted Lord, the ecstatic feeling of wonder and admiration will take place of every other, and this will swell their bosoms for ever and ever: “*Lord, when saw we thee an hungered?*” They are conscious of having done nothing to merit this honour. Nothing that ever they did is worthy to be named in the presence of the throne; and throughout eternity, disclaiming all worth or desert in themselves, they will cast down their crowns before Him that sits on the throne, and exclaim, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain”—“Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb, for ever.” What an elevating consideration to animate to holy activity and diligence, and to willing sacrifice in Christ’s service, is “the great recompense of the reward” that is reserved for the righteous in the kingdom of their Father!

Secondly. *The godly youth, dismissed by death from his labours on earth, is immediately present with the Lord.* The apostle’s hope is the blissful expectation of all the saints, “When I shall be absent from the body, I shall be present with the Lord.”¹ The assurance given by the dying Saviour to the expiring malefactor is virtually tendered to every faithful servant of God, in relation to the concluding period of his earthly existence, “*To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*”² Soon as the sanctified spirit is disengaged from its earthly companion, it is carried by angels to “Abraham’s bosom.” It beholds the Redeemer in his full-face splendour and glory; it sees him as He is, and shall be eternally with Him. No tongue can adequately declare, or heart conceive, the bliss that is wrapt up in admission to the glorious presence of Christ. Faithful servants, while here, fervently desired that they might enjoy his gracious presence and behold his glory. At times, they realized the object of their aspirations. They had glimpses of his glory, and they could declare, “God is in this place.” But

¹ 2 Corinthians v. 8.

² Luke xxiii. 43.

the vision was clouded and transient, and the visit of love was temporary. In heaven, they will see Him no longer through a glass darkly, but face to face. The vision shall be joy-inspiring, transforming, and beatifying. They shall be satisfied, when they "awake, with his likeness; they shall see his face in righteousness." "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."¹ In the person of Christ, the redeemed introduced into heaven will behold the Man their Brother; and, at the same time, by faith they will see the fulness of uncreated Deity dwelling "*substantially*" in Him. This will be the unclouded, eternal light of glory; and, in its attractive splendour, every object of intellectual delight and spiritual vision will be perceived and enjoyed. In the New Jerusalem there is no night; and the blessed inhabitants have no need of the sun, nor the moon, nor a candle, nor any light; for the "glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Knowledge will be perfect, when holiness is complete. The presence of Christ with the saints in heaven is the pledge and assurance of familiar and blissful intercourse. Distance or separation exists no longer. They are "jewels" of the Redeemer's crown—they are gathered to his bosom. The Lamb in the midst of the throne leads them and feeds them. They sit with Him as honoured guests at his table in his Father's house, and they drink new wine with Him in his kingdom. Thus they enjoy fully what they had often intensely desired here. They see the Lamb slain—their Friend and Elder Brother in all his beauty—without any intervening veil or cloud. They value his blissful presence, and they are with Him for evermore.

How greatly does such a privilege transcend all the highest views which the most gifted individuals could entertain here! If Newton, the prince of philosophers, could say, near the end of life, that he seemed to himself a little child, standing on the shore of a great sea, and gathering up a few pebbles, while the vast ocean of truth lay before him still unexplored, may we not exult in the prospect of being exalted to a state, where the least in the kingdom shall know immensely more than the most eminent son of science on earth—where the understanding and heart will at once be full of light, and where the Saviour's glorious presence will unfold the deepest mysteries, and make all bright with unfading glory?

Thirdly. *There will be enjoyed the companionship of perfected saints and of holy angels.* It is recorded of an ancient sage, that he

¹ Psalm xvii. 15; 1 John iii. 2.

rejoiced in the prospect of immortality, because he would, in passing out of the body, enjoy the society of Plato, and Socrates, and other renowned philosophers. How much higher should be the Christian's joy, in the assurance that he shall, in heaven, have companionship with the family of God, consisting of holy angels, and the adopted ransomed children—saints made perfect! A large part of their spiritual enjoyments here, consisted in intercourse with the virtuous and the good. They were gathered into one body, and made members of the same household of faith. They loved, and were loved; they had an interest in the prayers of God's people; and, in prosecuting schemes of usefulness, they had the presence with them of some who were "the light of the world," and the co-operation of many others of the "excellent ones of the earth," with whom they were personally unacquainted. The communion of saints supplied to them while on earth sources of the sweetest and most hallowed delights; and it was, besides, the immediate way of conducting them to the highest possible privilege—communion with God Himself. "*These things have we written unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"¹ But, however excellent was this intercourse on earth, there were drawbacks in the enjoyment, which will be unknown in heaven. The saints while here are imperfect. They are often parted by distance and other causes. Death divides them, and there are many obstacles to their free and full intercourse—many impediments to the success of their holiest enterprises. None of these things operate any more in glory. They are gathered into the "General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn," and enjoy, in the presence of the Lamb, holiest intercourse with his glorified members. The social principle is refined and exalted to the highest degree, and finds its appropriate exercise in the companionship of the blessed for evermore. There would seem to be no reason to doubt that the saints in glory will *mutually recognize each other*. Their faculties are purified and enlarged to the utmost; and the love which bound them to fellow-saints on earth, and the memory which caused the past often to predominate over the present, we have every reason to believe, will impart the liveliest interest to the intercourse of saints, now gathered home to the Father's house. The employments and enjoyments of the saints in heaven are uniformly represented as social; and this they could not properly be.

¹ 1 John i. 3.

without mutual recognition. The scene on the Mount of Transfiguration, displayed saints on earth and saints in heaven mutually acquainted, in the manifestation of their Lord's glory ; and much more may we expect that the redeemed, when gathered home to heaven, will fully know each other, amidst the full effulgence of the Sun of Righteousness. Faithful ministers rejoice in the prospect of their believing people being to them "a crown of rejoicing" in the presence of the Lord Jesus at his coming ; and this surely implies their knowledge of the travail which they had in their spiritual birth, their joy in their obedience of faith, and their triumph in the future meeting and recognition in glory. This exalted companionship enhances greatly the future reward of the righteous ; and to the generous heart of the devoted youth, removed early to the heavenly rest, it forms one of its most pleasing prospects. The fellowship of the Church on earth—at best, but mixed and imperfect, and liable to interruption—is exchanged for the communion of the most exalted beings in the universe. Amidst perfect love and complete holiness, there is nothing to interrupt friendship, or mar intercourse. The affections and faculties, refined and expanded to the highest measure, are capable of embracing the loftiest schemes of benevolence, and the saints in glory become joyful co-workers with God and one another in carrying them forward. No longer will any enemy oppress them, or obstacles impede their progress. There will be no distraction or division of counsels ; and concurring for ever in plans of boundless benevolence, they will share celestial pleasures with brethren in Christ, and will join with the whole redeemed family, and with holy angels, in advancing the Divine glory, and diffusing felicity through all eternity. "They shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." "They shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads ; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Fourthly. *The saints in heaven will be engaged in honourable and dignified employments.* What these shall be, in our present imperfect state, we are unable to describe. But everything that we are told of the saints' condition in heaven, warrants the idea that their work there will be most ennobling. We have no reason to think that theirs will be a state of passive contemplation and praise. They *rest not* day nor night, yet their work is not laborious or oppressive. They are *actively* employed in the

¹ Matthew viii. 12 ; Isaiah xxxv. 10.

immediate presence of the Lord whom they love, and enjoy his blissful approval continually. What hinders that, as they were here trained to do good, heaven should be the designed sphere of their holy activities for ever? And who will say that in that vast world there is not full scope for the diversified tastes and habits of all sanctified intellects? The saints *reign* with Christ in glory. They have authority over many things—each of them inherits the kingdom. When they praise, it is with “harps of gold,” implying that they are precious and durable, as they are attuned to the sweetest melody. They wave their palms in honour of the Lamb, enjoying the fruits of completed victory; and they follow the Lamb as He leads them to “fountains of living water.” If the youthful believer feels that God’s work, even in its lowest departments, is most honourable; if, as the venerable apostle, even when he had assurance of glory, was desirous to stay that he might do Christ service on earth, he is so wedded to his work as to experience reluctance at first in the view of quitting it, how great must be the joy of employing consecrated powers for ever in lofty activities for the promotion of God’s glory! Obedience here—absolute and complete—will be their highest felicity. In heaven, every subject will be a crowned king. In the immediate presence of their exalted Sovereign—and with affections enlarged, and joys unutterable—they will, each in his place, in the sphere for which grace on earth trained him, serve day and night in the celestial temple, and throughout eternity co-operate in promoting the Divine glory.

Finally. Their joys will be “*unspeakable and everlasting.*” “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”¹ Beyond all the most elevated descriptions of heaven—beyond the most lofty conceptions of future glory which we are able to form here—will be the eternal felicity of the redeemed of the Lord. When the Apostle Paul was caught up into paradise, and was favoured with a near view of the heavenly glory, he heard “unspeakable words, which it is not *possible* for a man to utter.”² In no terms of human language, that can be understood on earth, could he communicate adequate conceptions of the glory that was manifested, or of the blissful condition of the inhabitants of heaven. No wonder that the

¹ 1 Corinthians ii. 9.

² 2 Corinthians xii. 4. *ὅσα ἴδον ἀδρόπω λαλῆσαι*—so the original words may be better rendered.

venerable apostle was thus nonplussed ; for the objects of enjoyment and delight are infinite in their nature, and the faculties and capacities of the redeemed in heaven are elevated and expanded, far beyond any example or comparison that is furnished from earth. God is seen face to face, in transcendent and ineffable glory ; and all the bright and wondrous objects that cluster around his throne are beheld without any interposing medium, without a cloud or interruption, for ever.

The saints in heaven see as they are seen, and know as they are known. The glass is laid aside ; they need no light of the sun or the moon, or candle, or of any created medium of vision, for the Lord is their "everlasting light, and their God their glory." Like as the *shadow* of things spiritual and Divine, under the ancient economy, gave place to the *very image* of these things when the Redeemer came, and under the Gospel, so in heaven there will be enjoyed the *living, lasting substance*—as far surpassing the highest privileges of grace on earth, as the animated form does the most faithful likeness of the painter.

Till the day shall fully declare it, all attempts at exhibiting the inheritance reserved for the righteous in the kingdom of their Father must fail. It is enough to say that it will be such as is not unworthy of God to confer, and as is not unbefitting the saints to receive ; such as will furnish an adequate display of the exceeding riches of his grace, and as will be an honour suitable to the lineage and dignity of the children of God, when they are freed from all corruption, and brought home to their Father's house to abide for ever. Speaking of this felicity in contrast with present affliction and trial, and as the glorious end of faith and of suffering, the Apostle Paul designates it, "*A far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory.*"¹ Every word here is intended to heighten our conception of this unspeakable happiness, and as if the most fertile language in the world could furnish no terms suited to express fully his conceptions on the subject. The word for glory in the Hebrew Scriptures signifies *weight*, and the saint's felicity is, besides, said to be a "weight of glory," an "exceeding weight," a "far more exceeding," and an "eternal weight of glory." The consummation of this happiness is, that it can know no diminution or change, and that it will never have an end. Millions of ages past, and it will be but beginning. From

¹ 2 Corinthians iv. 17. καὶ ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰωνίου βαρὸς δόξης.

the glorious presence of the Lord the saints will go no more out. Progression marks the works of God on earth; and why should not this, too, be the law of his eternal kingdom? The happiness of the redeemed will not only be unending: it will be fresh, renewed, and increasing perpetually, world without end.

Here we must close. We see yet but through a glass darkly. But when our work shall be done, and our warfare ended, then are we assured that, in the blissful presence of our Lord and Redeemer, and in the full enjoyment of God—Father, Son, and Spirit—and in communion with glorified saints and holy angels for ever, we shall receive a reward for all our labours and trials in our Master's service on earth, such as will furnish a theme of perpetual wonder and eternal praise. The servants of God, gathered from all nations, and clothed in white robes—the glorious palm-bearing company—will exclaim, with a loud voice, as they willingly ascribe to sovereign grace all the glory, "SALVATION TO OUR GOD, WHICH SITTETH UPON THE THRONE, AND UNTO THE LAMB!"¹

May the young be animated by the prospect of this blessed "recompense of reward," to choose the best part which can never be "taken away," to dedicate themselves and all their talents to Christ's service, and to live as strangers and pilgrims on earth, setting their affections on things above, and continually looking for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God!"

¹ Revelation vii. 10.

II.

THE

FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING :

THE INSTITUTION, NATURE, HISTORY, AND
ADVANTAGES OF

SELECT CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

THE FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING.

INTRODUCTION.

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened. and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”—MALACHI iii. 16, 17.

THE period when Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, uttered, by the Spirit of inspiration, these remarkable words, was one of deep and solemn interest. More than a century had elapsed since a band of captive Hebrews, under the guidance of Ezra the scribe, and the able leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, had returned to the land of their fathers, and had taken measures for rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem, and for re-establishing the ancient polity, civil and ecclesiastical. For a time, the restored Hebrews appeared to be animated by the spirit of genuine patriotism and ardent piety ; and notwithstanding the opposition of enemies, and great outward difficulties, the good work had gone on and prospered. The servants of God who conducted the undertaking were men of a right spirit—deeply impressed with the exciting remembrance of the former greatness of their nation—intensely affected on account of its present fallen condition—alive to the claims of Jehovah’s law upon their devoted homage, and earnestly looking forward to the glory that was in future to be revealed—to the promotion of which all their efforts were dedicated.

Holy prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, were raised up, and commissioned to animate the builders of the temple ; and as

often as some adverse change took place in the affairs of the returned captives, through the hostility of unfriendly Persian rulers, or the apathy and worldliness of the people themselves, they revived their drooping spirits, and stimulated them to renewed exertions, by presenting to them the thrilling memories of former times, and by disclosing to them the future glory and distinction to be enjoyed by their nation, through the advent of the long-promised Messiah. The frame-work of the civil polity had at length been settled, the institutions of worship had been re-modelled according to the Divine pattern. The temple had been finished, which, although not externally "magnifical" as was that built by King Solomon, was yet to surpass it in glory, by receiving within its walls incarnate Deity, the substantial Shechinah, God personally dwelling between the cherubim. This auspicious commencement was followed by years of sad declension. The first race of devoted labourers, who had braved the perils of the journey from Babylon, and the opposition of heathen adversaries in the land, and had established a pure worship and a scriptural government, had been called away from earthly trials to their glorious reward. Men destitute of public spirit had succeeded. Religion had degenerated into an empty form. The wall of Jerusalem was broken down, the chambers of the temple had been polluted by the admission of uncircumcised idolaters, the Jewish people had forgotten their recent signal deliverance, and had sunk into a state of carnal ease and contented indifference. Affairs were rapidly hastening to ruin, when Nehemiah was raised up to seek the good of Jerusalem. Through his eminent public spirit, and by means of his self-denied exertions, gross abuses were corrected, the desolations of Jerusalem were repaired, the machinations of enemies were thwarted, corruptions in practice were purged away, and the newly-erected commonwealth, rulers, and people, were engaged in solemn covenant to be the Lord's.

Contemporary with this faithful reformer, or acting in concert with him, at least in the latter part of his administration, was the prophet Malachi. His mission was to reprove sins of aggravated demerit that extensively prevailed in the land of Israel; to excite and animate the faithful servants of God, as they mourned over various great evils in the Church and commonwealth, and were exposed to imminent external dangers; and to gladden their hearts with the assurance that the heavenly Messenger, the Lord whom they sought, would

speedily come to his temple. The concluding period of his ministry, as it would appear from his solemn warnings and fervid denunciations, witnessed an increase of irreligion and ungodliness in the land of Israel. The service of the sanctuary was forsaken, tithes and offerings were withheld, and the ministry was secularized. Hypocrites and formalists abounded, who copied the sins of their fathers, robbed God of his due, and manifested in all their conduct about religion a narrow, selfish, contracted spirit. Blasphemers wearied God with their words, accounted the proud and prosperous wicked happy; and ignorant of their own character, and self-deceived, were ever ready to deny God's being, providence, and perfection, when they were balked in their schemes, or when their enemies prevailed. Profane infidels and impious scoffers spoke "stout" words against God. They said it is "vain to serve the Lord," and "what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" These were the spirit and language of hardened unbelief and presumptuous confidence. Making a merit of their religious duties and counterfeit humiliation, they yet daringly contemned God's service, virtually declared that rebels, who had cast off all religion, had the advantage, and, for their own part, seemed prepared to adopt the cause of open and utter ungodliness.

Amidst this abounding wickedness,—many bold leaders in iniquity, and many following their steps, while there were few to stand in the breach, or to stem the torrent,—a small number was yet left, of whom the most honourable testimony is borne in the evil time, and for whom is reserved a glorious recompense of reward. Like stars twinkling in a murky firmament, they appear shining in beauteous lustre, and relieve the dismal gloom, holding forth the hope of deliverance and future blessing. The prophetic spirit, ere it takes its departure from the Church, lingers with evident delight in depicting the character of this faithful few—in describing their loved employment, and in fixing the thought upon the eminent glory that awaited them when their labours and trials were finished. Just before announcing the coming of "the great and dreadful day of the Lord," when tremendous judgments should be executed on the wicked, and before proclaiming the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, with "healing under his wings," the prophet expatiates with peculiar interest on those who feared the Lord and thought upon his name; and he holds up to view "the mark of the prize of their high calling," when he declares "they

shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I make up my jewels."

With peculiar emphasis, Malachi portrays the character of this remnant of devoted ones, and notes the time when they dared to be singular. They "*feared the Lord*" when others contemned his authority, and waxed bold in iniquity. Holy awe of the Divine Majesty—a prevailing sense of his gracious presence, dread of offending Him, and of coming short of his rest—filled their minds. This was their predominant feeling. They walked humbly with God while others careered in mad-dened folly, and exulted in insolent boasting. They thought upon the Divine name, while others despised and blasphemed it. It was the object of their fervent and supreme affections—the stronghold of their confidence—the theme of their joyful praise. The character of Israel's God as their strength, comfort, and portion for ever, sustained their spirits, and enabled them to rejoice even in tribulation. All their enjoyments and hopes were centred in the Divine name; and with wrapt exultation they ever declared, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever."¹ This was to them the most engaging, fertile subject—an inexhaustible theme of contemplation for all time and for eternity. "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord."² Fervently did these fearers of the Lord love his blessed name; as others despised and reproached it, earnestly did they seek to honour it; and their highest ambition was to diffuse abroad everywhere the savour of his truth and salvation.

They were distinguished, too, by their *fellowship and intercourse*. Separated from a godless and perverse generation, they cultivated intercourse with fellow-believers. They chose their company, and placed all their delight in the saints—the excellent of the earth.³ They were attracted to them by feelings of the strongest affection, and bound to them by ties the most tender and endearing. United in bonds of a holy brotherhood, and cemented by a love the most powerful that exists among creatures, and as gathered into one family, and made partakers of a common salvation and hope, they rejoiced in the mutual participation of blessed privileges, and they exercised joint sympathy in privation and trial. From the

¹ Psalm xx. 7; xlv. 8.

² Psalm civ. 33, 34.

³ Psalm xvi. 2.

fulness of the heart their mouths spake. Their conversation was in heaven. They gave utterance to their loving and deep thoughts on God's name, for mutual exhortation, encouragement, and comfort. Their language was ever, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." "These things have we spoken unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us : and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."¹ Their holy converse contrasted with the profane and polluting intercourse of the ungodly ; with the cavils of the infidel, the sneers of the blasphemer, and the ribald songs of the licentious. And singularly was it approved and accepted. While they conversed and prayed together, their own loved Lord was a delighted listener. "He hearkened and heard," and recorded their pious words in his "book of remembrance," to be preserved in an indelible record, and to be produced hereafter as evidence of their being entitled to immortal honour and glory.

And, finally, they were characterized by *devoted obedience*. They served God as a son with his father. Their lives were dedicated to Him—they greatly delighted in the way of his commandments—and, as a dutiful child, cherishing constant affection to a worthy parent, and concerned for his honour in the spirit of adoption, they did service to their Father in heaven. Their time, their talents, their lives, they regarded as wholly his. The employments in which they willingly engaged they viewed as their "Father's business," and they found them to be perfect freedom. Their highest desire was to meet the approval of their glorious and gracious Master. How illustrious the honour and reward prepared for these servants of God ! Unnoticed and despised by an apostate generation, they were yet objects of special regard to Him who sits upon the throne. He was present at their mutual conferences, and registered their gracious words. In his book of living remembrances He enrolled their names ; and their services in a degenerate age, He recorded as pleasing and acceptable to Him, and as destined to receive an illustrious reward. Their pious speeches were regarded as the fruit of grace in the heart, and as indicating the principles which they were prepared to embody in devoted and sustained exertion. The sighs of these mourners in Zion were inscribed in God's book, as their tears were collected into his bottle, and none of their words or prayers

¹ Psalm lxi. 16 ; 1 John i. 3.

were ever to be lost, or effaced from the Divine remembrance. They were to be abundantly recompensed in the resurrection of the just. A portion in the grace of the covenant is guaranteed to them now, and a share hereafter in the glory to be revealed. "*I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serves him.*" Even the most eminent servants of God are sensible that they need sparing mercy. Hence Nehemiah prays, "Lord, spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy;" and David exclaims, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, who could stand?"¹ The favour extended to these fearers of God is that of a father to a son that serveth him. He is not strict to mark iniquity against them. He accepts their persons in the Beloved. He puts the best construction upon their pious designs, and makes the best of their services. He mitigates their afflictions, saves them from death, and regards them ever with the infinite pity and complacency of the Father in heaven towards his children.

"*They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I make up my jewels.*" How unspeakable the honour conferred upon them at last! They are now God's "peculiar treasure." To them are appropriated the whole privileges of God's Israel, when others are disinherited and rejected. Like "precious jewels," they are esteemed of rare and great value; they are polished with the utmost care; preserved so that they cannot be lost, and destined to the highest ultimate honour. The day when these jewels shall be all gathered, is "the day of the revelation of Christ," and, at the same time, of "the manifestation of the sons of God." Their polishing complete, their imperfection fully removed, they are then set in a diadem of honour, each shining with remarkable brilliancy in its appropriate place, and all together reflecting the matchless glory of their exalted King. They are then, in the amplest sense, fully and for ever his, as there is no more any contrary part in them; and they are separate from others, as He publicly owns them, and they are perfectly assured of their sonship. This honour shall be conferred upon them before an admiring universe.

Such were the beloved of the Lord in the degenerate times of the last of the Old Testament prophets; such were their character and works; and such was their eminent distinction. Need we add, that in this attractive picture, there are sketched the grand features of pure and undefiled religion, and its bright

¹ Nehemiah xiii. 22; Psalm cxxx. 3.

eward in every subsequent period? Under a more spiritual dispensation, even amidst the expanding evangelical light of the nineteenth century, there is nothing wanting in this delineation to exhibit the character of faithful and approved servants of God; as we cannot conceive of higher privileges and of a more exalted honour than those which are declared in this passage, to be shared on earth and enjoyed in heaven. While moral and spiritual darkness overspreads vast portions of the world's population; while, even in Christian lands, many act like the scoffers and blasphemers of Malachi's day; while within the Church lukewarmness prevails, and "the love of many has waxed cold," there are a few yet who fear the Lord and think on his name, and who serve Him with devoted affection, as a son his father.

By one marked feature has this faithful remnant in all past times been characterized, and this they should aim to exhibit as their chief distinction at the present eventful period. "THEY SPOKE OFTEN ONE TO ANOTHER." Disciples of Christ are required to cultivate a holy and endearing fellowship. The "communion of saints" is not only to be an article of their creed, it is to be practically embodied in their whole spirit and life, and to find its expression in all ways appropriate for its exercise. Primitive Christianity will be revived, and become mighty to convince a gainsaying world, when it can be said as of old, "See how these Christians love one another." Spiritual intercourse among the fearers of God will be a means of blessing—their union will be their defence against common enemies. Mutual counsel and united prayer will animate in difficulties and nerve to successful efforts for promoting the kingdom of Christ. Thus will the reproach of the Church's divisions cease. In seasons of trial and prevailing judgments, the faithful will be spared in Divine mercy and compassion, and theirs shall be a glorious reward in the day that "the jewels" of the King are fully made up and set in his diadem of glory.

To speak thus often one to another, the friends of truth need to be brought together in a *special ordinance of worship*, for spiritual converse and united prayer. There may be, as there will certainly be among real saints, occasional intercourse otherwise, as those who are so separated, either by distance or by unhappy divisions, that they cannot meet on earth, will yet hold fellowship in Christ the Head, and at the mercy-seat. But "to speak often one to another," it is requisite that, like the primitive Christians, believers should meet together in one

place, and have stated times for mutual edification and united prayer and praise. The FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING is an institution admirably adapted to subserve these important purposes. Claiming a scriptural warrant for its distinct observance, it has ever been associated with seasons of revival in the Church, and with the highest triumphs of Divine truth in the earth. Its disuse has been the sad and sure index of the decay of evangelical principle and practical godliness; and in the future universal diffusion and triumph of the truth, we are assured that this ordinance will have a conspicuous place. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also."¹

¹ Psalm ii. 8; Zechariah viii. 20, 21.

CHAPTER I.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

NEXT to communion with God himself, the fellowship of saints is one of the most exalted and endearing privileges which can be realized on earth. Little as it may be understood or valued in our day, it is yet an article of the creed of the universal Church. "I BELIEVE IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS" is not only a part of our Christian profession, but, as a practical principle, it is inseparably connected with the enjoyment of spiritual benefit from the Word, and with our edification and comfort in the Divine life. Speaking of the result of inspired teaching, the Apostle John declares, "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"¹ We are here taught—1. That a principal design of the proclamation of the Gospel, whether by preaching or by Christian intercourse, is to bring believers into a holy fellowship. 2. That this fellowship of saints stands in immediate connection with communion with a Three-One God himself. Those who, by their believing on the Word, are brought into this sacred fraternity of saints, are thereby introduced into friendly and familiar intercourse with the God of salvation, and become partakers of its high and inestimable blessings. By the communion of saints, believers, the members of one holy family, and partakers of the common salvation, and of the same blessed hope, have a mutual interest in matters of the highest importance. They are separated from the rest of the world, and *incorporated into one spiritual body*. Marked with the same seal and badge of a holy profession, they are called to like solemn duties, they are led to engage in similar services, and to encounter like fears, dangers, and common enemies. They have joys and privileges in common; they live to the same high end, and they cherish the like expectations, and are animated by the same blessed hopes.

¹ 1 John i. 3.

Hence result the offices of a sacred brotherhood. A warm interest and complacency in saints is a fruit of the new birth, and its certain evidence: it is characteristic of all who belong to the "household of faith." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth Him also that is begotten of Him."¹

In maintaining the communion of saints, we unite with fellow-believers *in acts of joint worship*. We pray with and for one another; and in united prayers and praises, we come to the Father of mercies, and receive blessings that we mutually need from the throne of the Eternal. We sympathize with each other in *all evil things*—in afflictions, in temptations, in conflicts; and we willingly share with one another *whatever good things* we possess. We bear each other's burdens, and impart to the necessities of brethren. Of earthly goods which we possess, we are ready to communicate to those who are in want; and whatever spiritual gifts and blessings we have received, we regard as conferred upon us, that we may use them for the edification and comfort of all who are gathered with us into the same family of faith. "*If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.*" The invitation of Moses to his brother-in-law, when he sought that he would accompany Israel in their journeyings in the wilderness, expresses the spirit cherished by every real believer towards all that he would desire to see enrolled in the same holy fellowship. It implies, moreover, a full obligation to perform the offices of fraternal communion, by sharing with them all blessings which himself enjoys. "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. It shall come to pass, yea, it shall come to pass, that what goodness the Lord will do unto us, the same shall we do unto thee."²

Such and so excellent being the communion of saints, it must be of high importance to realize and cultivate it, whether we have regard to our own best interests, or would promote the interests of Christ's Church in the earth. There are *means* divinely prescribed for this purpose, and, by duly attending upon them, we obtain for ourselves eminent privileges, and contribute, besides, to the benefit of the whole Christian community, and of each separate individual member. The social principle—an original part of our constitution—is refined and

¹ 1 John iii. 14; v. 1.

² Numbers x. 29. 32.

elevated by the grace of the Gospel. True religion draws it forth to its noblest efforts, and renders it influential of unspeakable good to the human family. The fellowship of believers in Christ is the most exalted exemplification of the social principle on earth, the nearest step to that heavenly communion which the redeemed shall enjoy with the Redeemer, and with all holy beings throughout eternity.

All the ordinances of our holy religion are adapted to promote this fellowship. Even in the private study of the Divine Word, and in meditation and secret prayer, the believer unites with many others who are deriving light and nourishment from the Scriptures, and who, in sincerity and truth, call upon the Lord, both theirs and ours. In the retirement of the closet, when we pour out our hearts in prayer, we say, "*Our Father which art in heaven*"—thus addressing God as persons belonging to the one family of faith, and praying with and for others. When we have no opportunity of personal intercourse with fellow-saints, we yet maintain communion with them in spirit; and we feel that we are not only one with them in Christ the Head, but also that we can meet with them frequently at the mercy-seat. In the public ordinances of religion, and especially at the Lord's table, and in maintaining a joint testimony for precious truths amidst privations and trials, we enjoy valuable means for cultivating holy fellowship. In hearing the words of eternal life, and in public prayer and praise, we are strengthened and encouraged by the presence of fellow-travellers to Mount Zion. While we feed on the provision of our Father's house, and unite in the same devotional exercises, holy affections are enkindled. We rise above fears, enemies, and discouragements, and go on our way rejoicing. In the Lord's Supper, by a beautiful and appropriate symbol, participants hand the sacramental elements to one another; thus sharing, in the language of action, the blessed spiritual provision of the feast, and exemplifying, in the most expressive manner, the endearing communion of saints. "*We being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*"¹ As witnesses for important and despised truths—called to vigorous and united effort—exposed to common and often severe privations and trials—and engaged to mutual co-operation and sympathy, we are peculiarly required to feel and act as a band of brothers. Like the primitive Christians, we should, "with one heart and mind, strive together for the

¹ 1 Corinthians x. 17.

faith of the Gospel ;" and as feeling the obligation of the solemn engagement expressed in one of the federal deeds of our Presbyterian forefathers, we should account whatever of injury is done to the least of the brethren, "as done to all universally, and to every one in particular." ¹

There are, moreover, various *occasional ways* of promoting the interchange of Christian affection and friendship. The saints take sweet counsel together in going to the house of God in company—they meet sometimes in worldly affairs—and they mingle together in the delightful intercourse of family scenes. Their interest and happiness are alike to improve such interviews—by recognizing their relation to the same Father, and their connection with the one family that in heaven and earth is named after Christ. Besides the joy of seeing each other in the flesh, and exchanging passing words of love and comfort, they should aim to give expression to communion of hearts, by engaging directly in spiritual converse—by exhorting and comforting one another daily—and by joining, ere they separate, in the hallowed exercises of united supplication and thanksgiving.

Seasons of affliction are often a means of exciting to acts of Christian fellowship, as they serve to test its sincerity, and to exhibit its excellency. Sympathy in sickness and distress—the fervent prayers uttered at the bed of disease, the help administered in privation and suffering, and the tears mingled with the bereaved—exemplify the mind of Him who is a "Brother born for adversity," and who in all the afflictions of his people is afflicted.² Such feelings and acts express what is peculiar to saints alone, and what to tried ones is found not only a seasonable relief, but, at the same time, one of the highest and most valued privileges. Even when death has made a breach in the circle of endeared friendship, the communion of saints will be manifested in appropriate acts. Our Lord declared the relation between Himself, and disciples still living, and Lazarus who had been removed, to be undissolved by death, when He said, "*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth;*" and when, in company with the twelve, He went to administer strong consolation to the bereaved family. He evinced, moreover, how consoling and blessed is the intercourse of saints with one another and with their exalted Lord, in times of sorrow and distress. When John the Baptist was taken away by a violent death, his attached disciples took up his body and buried

¹ Solemn League and Covenant.

² Isaiah lxiii. 9.

it, and went and told Jesus,¹ thus exhibiting their joint participation in trial, and their united application to the Source of all support and consolation. And when the proto-martyr Stephen became the victim of persecution, it is recorded that "devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him."² Primitive believers not only testified thus their regard to the memory of a faithful confessor, but at the same time gave expression to the feelings of holy fellowship, which death is unable to extinguish, and to hopes which look forward to joyful re-union beyond the grave.

While, in these various ways, the fellowship of saints is manifested and maintained, and many of its hallowed benefits are enjoyed, there is need of a *special religious institution*, in which believers may be drawn together at stated times in the closest intercourse, in which the eminent advantages of fraternal association may be fully realized. It is not enough that the communion of the faithful be secret and invisible, though this is frequently felt to be a precious privilege in relation to fellow-saints with whom we can seldom meet together, or whom we may never see on earth. Nor does it accomplish all the purposes of saintly communion to have only occasional interviews with fellow-disciples, or to unite with them in ordinances, in which, from the nature of the case, there cannot be free interchange of Christian sentiment and affection, in which there is no place for mutual exhortation,—the reciprocation of cordial brotherly affection, and united special prayer.

The institution of SELECT FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS, in which Christian brethren voluntarily and regularly associate for social prayer and spiritual converse on Divine things, supplies a channel for the exercise and expression of gracious social affections, and a means for cultivating the communion of saints, which is admirably adapted for subserving these important ends, and without which they will be but rarely and imperfectly attained. Such an ordinance seems to be required, to answer a special design of Christian association on earth, and without it the provision of religious ordinances would appear to be incomplete. The Church fully organized is represented as composed of living members, who speak the truth in love, and grow up as a body conformed in all things to Christ, the glorious Head. "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,

¹ Matthew xiv. 12.

² Acts viii. 2.

maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."¹ By secret prayer, and the private study of the Word, we hold communion as individuals with the Father of our spirits, and receive blessings from the throne for ourselves and others. In the sweet exercises of family religion, we dedicate our households to God, and have domestic relations and scenes hallowed, through the favour of Him who condescends to take the endearing title of the "God of all the families of Israel." In the public fellowship of the Church, through the services of the sanctuary, in hearing the Word, and partaking of the sacraments, we associate with all that call upon the name of the Lord; we advance the Divine glory throughout the earth; and obtain for ourselves and others blessings that descend like the dew upon the hill of Zion. But in none of these ordinances is the opportunity fully furnished which members of the same spiritual family, and fellow-travellers to the same blessed home and country must always desire, of imparting to each other their feelings and views of the exalted Master whom they love, of the holy privileges to which they have been called, and of communicating their mutual trials and joys, their fears and blissful hopes.

The freest interchange of spiritual sentiment and affection, it is true, is provided in the domestic constitution; but this is confined to those who are united by the ties of natural kindred, or who are gathered together under the same roof. The private fellowship-meeting provides for intimate Christian intercourse of a more extensive kind. Akin to the domestic communion in freedom and tenderness, it yet embraces a wider range, and receives as brethren in Christ those who are of the family of God, and such as, united in a common profession of faith, are fellow-travellers to the land of inheritance. More select than the fellowship of joint worship in the sanctuary, it realizes more directly the great doctrine of *the Christian priesthood*, and admits those who join in this association to offer in company sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, and to impart to each other the views and affections of their hearts, and their mutual privileges, sorrows, and hopes. The private social meeting aims to unite, in the most endearing manner, those who are of one heart and mind in relation to Christ Jesus the Lord, and the great things of his glory and salvation. As He himself said on a memorable occasion, pointing to his disciples, so say those again who unite with others in fellowship for prayer and mutual

¹ Ephesians iv. 16.

edification, "Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever will do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."¹ The private social meeting, though select, is not necessarily limited in extent. Though it may be proper that a comparatively small number in one locality should statedly meet together for social religious exercises, yet such associations may be multiplied, so as to embrace all the members of a religious community, and so as ultimately to comprehend the whole visible Church of Christ. As so many centres of light and spiritual influence, fellowship prayer-meetings may diffuse abroad the savour of the Redeemer's name, so as to fill the visible Church with the "fragrance of his good ointments," and to spread throughout the world his renowned fame. Like the primitive Christians in Jerusalem after the pentecostal shower of the Spirit, the days shall yet come to Zion when believers in every land shall frequently assemble in different places to call on the name of the Lord, to cultivate the most endeared intercourse, or, according to the Sacred Record, to "continue in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Then shall the departed glory again dwell in the land. Through the blessing upon a united and devoted Church, the Saviour's name shall be "great among the Gentiles, from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same; and in every place incense and a pure offering shall be offered to his name."²

¹ Matthew xii. 49, 50.

² Malachi i. 11.

CHAPTER II.

INSTITUTION AND NATURE OF FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS— OBLIGATIONS TO THEIR OBSERVANCE.

THE Fellowship Prayer-Meeting is an association of Christian brethren for joint religious worship, and mutual edification, by means of spiritual converse. It is *private*, as distinguished from the public ordinances of the sanctuary; and *select*, as consisting of such as are one in their profession of faith, and are united in Christian affection, and a becoming godly practice.

This institution can certainly plead a Divine warrant. Yet it is admitted that it is not prescribed in the Word, in the same manner as some other religious ordinances—such as the Sabbath, the preaching of the Word, and the sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are institutions properly *positive*, and they are therefore of positive prescription. There are other duties, which are either so plain, or which flow so directly and immediately from the relations in which individuals are placed, that, in the Word of God, they are rather assumed than commanded. Such are those of family worship, and those connected with various domestic and other social relations. These are objects of frequent allusion, and are subjected to specific regulation in the Sacred Word; but they are not in express terms commanded. It need not therefore be thought strange that we may not be able to adduce from Scripture any formal or explicit injunction for stated social worship. We have no express precept for prayer as connected with the preaching of the Word; or for separation for humiliation and confession of sin, as preparatory to the observance of the Lord's Supper; and yet these religious exercises are certainly sanctioned by the general scope of the Scriptures. The pious sentiment and feeling of good men have always called for such exercises; and they have been authorized by the almost universal practice of the Church.

The class of duties to which we refer, is of the kind which theologians designate *moral natural*; that is, they originate

from our relation, as moral and accountable beings; to God, and to one another as subjects of his moral government, and as joint partakers of gracious privileges. They do not therefore require positive prescription; but yet their obligation is as fully confirmed by the requirements and examples of the Word, as that of those which are expressly enjoined. It may be alleged that the social prayer-meeting is only of *occasional* obligation, and that as its observance is voluntary, so attendance upon it may be neglected by Christians without blame. Still it will be granted that there are many occasions—and these will appear more numerous, the more solemnly the matter is considered—in which Christians have the opportunity and call to associate thus together, and in which the example of the saints has strongly recommended this exercise. If the duties which Christians owe to one another are left to casual or occasional intercourse, their performance will be either unduly delayed, or altogether omitted; and the mournful consequence will be—what is frequently observable—they will either cease to be acknowledged as duties, or the sense of their value and importance will be greatly diminished. It is only *the stated observance* of social prayer that provides for duties which we owe to fellow-saints being properly performed; and in this way alone can we reap the great and manifold benefits of Christian intercourse.

The duties of the social prayer-meeting, like others of our holy religion, should be a *free-will offering*; but it is not therefore a matter of indifference whether we perform them or not. If the time and manner of their observance is not matter of distinct specification, and they are thus of a more voluntary character than some other religious duties, still this does not weaken the reasons for their performance, or render it optional. The duties which moralists have termed duties of *imperfect obligation* form the highest test of Christian character; and their voluntary and ready performance furnishes the most marked evidence of the existence and power of gracious principles.¹ So private religious fellowship, though a voluntary service, is of the most weighty obligation, and its diligent cultivation will evidence the ascendancy of Christian love—the eminent power of grace, and the prevalence of a desire to glorify God, and to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Prayer has been well styled “the breath of the new

¹ See Chalmers's *Institutes of Theology*, vol. i.

creature." Wherever the grace of prayer has been imparted, it will flow forth in appropriate acts. We are irresistibly impelled to pray for those whom we love; and, as we have opportunity, to pray *with* them. We cannot but delight in their company too, and desire to converse with them on matters on which the heart strongly feels, or which are matters of common interest. Prayer and spiritual converse are, in their very nature, social exercises. On this principle, Church-assemblies convene for united devotions; and hence, too, select societies gather together for joint supplication, and loving and sympathizing intercourse.

Were two or three persons cast together on a desolate island, if they were partakers of grace, they would be drawn to pray together. Hence originated domestic worship, and such, too, is the spring of social prayer and spiritual converse. It is the beautiful and just conception of Milton, that when there were but two holy human beings on earth, their fellowship was sanctified and elevated by acts of united adoration. This was the domestic worship of paradise; and though Adam and Eve were united in the most endearing ties of kindred, the case would not have been different had they had intercourse only as fellow-saints, without the bonds of earthly relationship. Their service had then been that of social private prayer, but their converse had been alike spiritual, and their devotions the same outflowings of humble and grateful hearts.

" Soon as they forth were come to open sight
Of dayspring and the sun, who, scarce uprisen
With wheels yet hovering o'er the crimson brim,
Shot parallel to the earth his dewy ray,
Discovering in wide landscape all the East,
Of Paradise and Eden's happy plains,
Lowly they bowed adoring, and began
Their orisons, each morning duly paid
In various style; for neither various style
Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
Their Maker, in fit strains pronounced, or sung
Unmeditated; such prompt eloquence
Flowed from their lips, in prose or numerous verse,
More tunable than needed lute or harp
To add more sweetness; and they thus began."¹

1. *The fellowship prayer-meeting is sanctioned by the law of nature.* The observance of this institution is accordant with right reason. The social principle is an essential part of our con-

¹ *Paradise Lost*, b. v., line 138.

stitution as human beings ; and its proper exercise in various relations is directed, as well by the universal desire of happiness as by regard to mutual interests and enjoyments. Man was not formed for solitary existence ; and even in paradise, God himself declared that it was not good to be alone. The desire of society, and the expectation of deriving from it pleasure and benefit, physical, intellectual, and moral, are among the most general and extensively prevalent of the fundamental emotions of our nature. The universal practice of mankind exhibits this original sentiment, and manifests the power of this original law. The principle of association is everywhere resorted to by men of kindred sentiments and similar pursuits, to promote individual improvement and to attain common valuable objects. Human society has been greatly benefited by the proper exercise of this principle ; and while it must be admitted that it has been, in a variety of cases, perverted and abused for effecting purposes mischievous and destructive, there can be no doubt that manifold improvement, and advancement too, have been the result of union and co-operation in the pursuit of laudable undertakings. In modern times, the power of association has been all but universally confessed. In all departments of human labour, it has been resorted to, in order to effect ends that are deemed valuable. Civilization has thus been promoted ; and the recent rapid advancement of society in knowledge, physical comfort, and the peaceful arts, is justly ascribed to the circumstance, that those who seek to promote improvements, betake themselves to mutual counsel and combination to accomplish their purpose.

The gracious renovation of our nature does not abolish any of our original instincts. On the contrary, it refines and elevates them, and powerfully directs them to the acquisition of ends that are worthy or honourable. Revelation declares that "*two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.*"¹ It illustrates the impulsive strength of association by a striking and expressive similitude, "Iron sharpeneth iron ; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."² The children of God are called to recognize the power and benefit of a principle so fundamental and so universally adopted. It is certainly capable of being applied with superior effect to the advancement of true religion throughout the earth, and for the promotion of the interests of practical

¹ Ecclesiastes iv. 9.

² Proverbs xxvii. 17.

godliness. If others avail themselves of social intercourse and co-operation to compass ends secular and temporary, much more should Christians aim, by fraternal counsel and holy fellowship, to realize objects of eternal moment. To neglect the employment of such a means of success in religion is to violate a principle of our nature, as well as a transgression of a first law of the renewed soul. To call it into frequent requisition is, on the other hand, to adopt an instrument the most suitable and potent for attaining the high and important ends of the heavenly calling. The conduct of men of the world reproves those who neglect select Christian fellowship. It is irrational to expect important spiritual results from individual, insulated efforts. The children of this world never act thus in the pursuit of mere earthly objects. Let it not be the reproach of professed Christians that, in this respect, "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." By assembling ourselves together, by mutual combination and co-operation, we should show the excellency of the wisdom that comes from above, while we evidence that religion is a "reasonable service," and that, in proportion to the importance and magnitude of the pursuit, we are ready to avail ourselves of every proper means for its attainment.

2. Such intimate fellowship, as the private social prayer-meeting supplies, results from **THE NEW STATE AND RELATION INTO WHICH GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED.**

By grace believers are separated from the world lying in wickedness, and are incorporated into one body under Christ the glorious Head. They are, as individuals, "brands plucked out of the burning"—redeemed, pardoned, and saved ones. By the great change effected in their state, they are not left solitary individuals; they are united in social ties, and their characters are exhibited and developed in various relations, demanding the performance of relative duties. When pardoned and justified, the saints are, at the same time, adopted into the family of God. While they thus become children of the same heavenly Father, they are at the same time enrolled in "the household of faith," and constituted a holy brotherhood. This implies that they cherish mutual tender love, and that they are thenceforth distinguished by endeared intercourse, sympathy, and mutual support. Those features of the redeemed family they cannot exhibit in a state of distance, separation, and estrangedness; they require for their manifestation to associate frequently in terms of intimate friendship. The sacred writers delight to

describe the saints by terms and phrases, which obviously imply special fellowship, and which would be devoid of any proper meaning, if those to whom they are applied did not recognize their real union, and perform offices of love. They are "fellow-servants" of one glorious Master, employed in the same service, and looking forward to the same blessed "recompense of reward;" and they are, in consequence, bound to co-operation, and to sharing in common labours and difficulties. They are "fellow-soldiers," and have thus to encounter common enemies, while they fight under one glorious Captain of salvation, and are ranged under the same displayed banner. They are therefore peculiarly fitted to assist and animate one another in the spiritual warfare. Pledged to their Leader by a sacramental vow, they are likewise pledged to stand true to each other in conflict and trial, to take frequent counsel together respecting the plans of the enemy, and concerning measures for mutual safety and deliverance, and to continue united in trial, defeat, and in the assured hope of ultimate victory.

Believers are, moreover, declared to be "fellow-citizens," and "joint-heirs" of a glorious inheritance; and such they cannot possibly be, without delighting in the city of God, and seeking earnestly the good of Jerusalem. Nor can they realize the blessed privilege of heirship, without conferring together concerning the portion of the saints—the heritage of Israel. Theirs is an estate in reversion, partly to be enjoyed here, but by far the largest portion lying beyond the Jordan. While they go forward to "a city of habitation," and seek a better country, even an heavenly, by familiar and holy intercourse, they lessen the difficulties of the way—they confirm each other in one blessed hope—their "conversation is in heaven," and they anticipate with lively delight the exalted social enjoyments of their Father's house in heaven.

Pleasures are enhanced and heightened by being shared with those whom we love; and by Christian fellowship, too, labours and toils are lessened and difficulties surmounted. And there is joy in the prospect, as there will be "fulness of joy" in the possession of the common inheritance of the redeemed for ever. How wonderfully near and endeared is the union of the saints! They are one body under one vital Head, and they are at the same time "members one of another." They have the same interests, labours, fears, conflicts, and hopes. Their mutual duties are the duties which brethren of the same family—fellow-servants and soldiers, fellow-pilgrims, citizens, and heirs—owe to

one another. Their high aims and prospects are the same; and their real interests for time and eternity, from the day of their holy calling till the close of their earthly pilgrimage, are incapable of disunion or separation. To effect these gracious designs, to subserve these most important purposes, Christians require to meet and speak often one to another. In select societies for united prayer and joint counsel, they exhibit their fraternal character, and discharge the duties of spiritual fellowship; and in these associations, too, they experience how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

3. THERE ARE SOLEMN DUTIES ENJOINED UPON CHRISTIANS WHICH CANNOT be properly performed, without their associating together for distinctive and select fellowship.

The incorporation of Christians into one body—their introduction into the same family—certainly implies that they owe special duties to one another. Our holy religion is diametrically opposed to all selfishness. Love—active, fruitful, and persevering love—is its grand element; and this must of necessity prompt to exertions to promote the welfare of its object. A leading precept of Christianity is, “OWE NO MAN ANYTHING, BUT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”¹ While we are bound to do good to all men as we have opportunity, there is a *speciality* in our beneficence towards “the household of faith.” The motto of our whole Christian conduct should ever be, “*None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*” Called as disciples of Christ to be benefactors of the world, we have a peculiar relation to fellow-believers, and to them we owe manifold important duties. In the Word of God these are distinctly enumerated, and their performance is enforced by motives the most persuasive and endearing. The precepts enjoining these duties suppose an intimate fellowship existing among the parties to whom they are addressed; and it is only by cultivating familiar intercourse and spiritual converse that they can be properly obeyed. Christians are commanded to “love one another;” to be “kindly affectioned one to another.” They are to “consider one another;” to “teach,” “admonish,” and “exhort” each other. They are to bear each other’s burdens, to confess their faults one to another, to forbear, forgive, and comfort each other, and to provoke one another to love and good works. They are required to exhort one another daily, to pray for one another. In the spirit of genuine humility and fraternal esteem and affection, they are in honour to

¹ Romans xiii. 8.

prefer one another ; and according as every man has received the gift, even so they are to "minister the same one to the other."¹

In their intercourse, fellow-professors are to study mutual edification, to strengthen the feeble-minded, and encourage the weak ; and they are to teach and admonish one another, "speaking in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." It is evident that these, and other duties of a similar kind, which are enjoined in the Bible, cannot be fully performed in private ; nor are public ordinances alone a suitable sphere for their exercise. True religion certainly delights in privacy ; and the experience of the heart is best cultivated in the retirement of the closet. We may, therefore, call in question the reality of that species of religion which lives only in the excitements and sympathies of public assemblies. But it must ever be held, at the same time, that genuine religious principle and feeling cannot be *confined* to the heart and the closet. They must come forth in embodied action, and pervade the whole life. They must diffuse around an influence upon others ; and, like the "alabaster box" of ointment broken and shed upon the Saviour's head, their fragrance will fill the whole house. It has been appositely said, that "single coals die out ; when drawn together they break into a flame." The Christian spirit, diligently cherished and assiduously cultivated in secret, will evidence its existence and power when we come in contact with fellow-Christians ; and it cannot but desire and delight in such intercourse as affords it free and full scope and expansion. This intercourse cannot be casual or infrequent, if either the offices of Christian love be duly discharged, or the important duties to which we have referred be properly performed.

Judiciously has it been remarked by an able American author,² "Love, which is the great manifestation of grace, is too communicable in its nature to be always pent up. The electric current will pervade all whose hands are joined in the domestic circle ;" and it may be affirmed, with equal truth, all who are united in the *Fellowship Meeting*. They will feel together, read God's Word together, sing together, and pray together ; and it is indispensable that there should be some established mode of cherishing and exciting this fellowship of experience. Mutual exhortation and confession of faults, and

¹ 1 Peter iv. 10.

² Rev. James W. Alexander, D.D. *Thoughts on Family Worship*, in *Christian's Fireside Library*, p. 206.

fraternal admonition, can neither be attended to in private nor in the great congregation ; nor can such duties, either in their spirit or outward observance, be performed aright, if Christian intercourse be only casual or occasional. Select, stated associations, and regular opportunities of meeting for united prayer and familiar spiritual converse, are evidently necessary, if the inspired directions are to be duly carried into effect, and if so important and beneficial a part of Christian practice is to be exhibited.

It may be easily shown, moreover, that other great duties, which are among the Church's primary functions, require such association for private fellowship. Efforts for the diffusion of the Scriptures, for the instruction of the ignorant and neglected in Christian lands, and for the evangelization of the nations, are now generally admitted to be best made by societies organized for such objects. It may be questioned, however, whether injury has not been done to this great cause by regarding such societies as merely *optional*, and not in the highest sense obligatory, and also by embracing in their membership those who entertain very different sentiments on fundamental articles of Christian faith, or whose religious practice is diverse. Certain it is, that the results of modern missionary exertions have not been equal to the experience of primitive times ; and there is a reason for this. Is there not ground to apprehend that the Church has been chargeable with a dereliction of duty in the organization which has been resorted to for carrying out her benevolent designs ; and that there has been too little private and social prayer for that spiritual influence, without which all human agency will be of no avail ? The select fellowship of Christians, instinct with spiritual life and ardour—"of one heart and mind"—would approve itself as the most suitable for bringing others to the knowledge of the truth, and for spreading the Redeemer's renowned fame. Such was undoubtedly the organization of the primitive Christian Church, when every bosom glowed with missionary zeal, and when the Gospel spread with extraordinary rapidity, and the Cross achieved its noblest triumphs. A return to a similar organization would hasten forward the subjugation of the nations to Immanuel's sceptre. The stated Fellowship Meeting is the best machinery for evangelistic efforts at home and abroad. It is fitted to be at once a happy means of revival in the Church, a Bible Association, a Missionary Institute, and a confederation for making aggressive efforts

against darkness and ungodliness wherever they prevail. It draws together those who are one in principle and in spiritual affection. Being select, and limited to a small number, meeting frequently in one place, it supplies the best means of leading all Christians to put forth active exertions in behalf of the truth, and of assigning a division of labour to the agency employed. There is, besides, afforded the opportunity of "reporting progress" frequently, and of adapting plans and efforts to existing circumstances, so as to secure the desired result. The power of *united prayer* is, moreover, not among the least of the advantages enjoyed; and by it is afforded the cheering and certain prospect of promised success. The encouraging assurance of the Saviour, "*If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven,*"¹ surely warrants us to expect that when brethren intimately known to each other, of one mind, and assembled for frequent earnest prayer, shall engage in the work, a success hitherto unexampled shall follow their labours.

4. The institution of private Fellowship Meetings can plead
DIVINE APPOINTMENT AND APPROVAL.

From the views which have been advanced, it may be readily inferred that an ordinance for the special maintenance of Christian fellowship has been provided. The dictates of nature point to it; the wants and cravings of the renewed heart require select and confidential fellowship, to afford them satisfaction; and the duties which Christians owe to one another indispensably demand such an institution for their due performance. We have, besides, more than mere inference, however legitimate, in behalf of stated associations for united prayer and spiritual intercourse. The King of Zion, who alone has the supreme and sovereign right to establish ordinances of worship, has expressly appointed this institution. His revealed will declares, in terms at once striking and comprehensive, his high sanction and approval of the practice.

Thus, under the Old Testament, in a time of gracious revival, the inhabitants of one city are represented as calling those of another to united prayer: "Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also."² At a subsequent important period of the history of God's ancient Church, the "fearers of the Lord" are distinguished by speaking often one to another, so that the exalted Master whom they

¹ Matthew xviii. 19.

² Zechariah viii. 21.

served was an approving listener ; and He guarantees to them a high and honourable recompense of reward. What could more impressively declare the importance and excellence of the exercise of private social fellowship? What could be a higher encouragement to engage in it with interest, and to persevere in its observance?

The change of the dispensation has in no respect weakened the sanction for social and private associations for prayer and Christian fellowship. On the contrary, under the new economy, their existence is recognized, and promises of the most gracious character, and of the highest value, are connected with their observance. The Redeemer himself declares, "*Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that ye shall ask, it shall be done for you of my Father who is in heaven.* For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."¹ The comprehensive character and value of this assurance cannot be too highly estimated. It is most condescending and encouraging, and secures the enjoyment of the most eminent blessings in connection with attendance upon this institution. The believing prayers of individual saints enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and are followed by a return of blessing. But there is ampler ground to expect an answer when believers, in holy union and agreement of heart, ask their Father in heaven in conjoint prayer and supplication. Even should the members of the praying assembly be very few, they have the warrant to expect a gracious hearing and a favourable answer. The faithful and true Witness assures us that, "If *two or three* agree on earth" to ask God, they shall succeed in their suit. And then He gives them full encouragement to present all their spiritual wants in united prayer at the footstool of mercy. It is as "touching anything that they shall ask," that the ample assurance is given, "It shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven." Who with such abundant encouragement would not seek this holy fellowship? What innumerable blessings for ourselves, for the Church, and the world, in reference to things of this present life, and for the world to come, might we obtain, if we associated together, and realized this holy agreement of heart and oneness of petition!

And, then, the *gracious presence* of the Redeemer is here assured to two or three who gather together in his name. This assembling together in Christ's name is in professing his

¹ Matthew xviii. 19, 20.

truth, and in obedience to his will ; in an institution, not of human contrivance, but of Divine appointment, for the promotion of his glory, and in dependence upon Him for acceptance and the desired blessing. What higher privilege could possibly be enjoyed than the presence of the King of saints, the great Master of assemblies, in such a meeting ! Under the former economy the promise was, "*In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and bless thee ;*"¹ and the royal psalmist rejoiced in God, loving the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.² But, in the abundance of Gospel privileges, the gracious presence of Christ, that which turns a wilderness into a paradise, and which, when fully enjoyed, forms the chief element of the felicity of heaven, is secured to *two or three* believers when met in Christ's name, in the lowest position, and in the humblest circumstances. This delightful promise extends to small associations, consisting of the least possible number, even to two persons. Who would not earnestly desire its fulfilment ? What saint of God will not eagerly seek after the meeting for united prayer and select fellowship, where the Well-Beloved has assured him of his gracious presence ? The blessed Redeemer, who delights in communion with his saints, gives the promise in remarkable terms. He does not say, "*I will be in the midst of them,*" but "*there am I in the midst of them.*" He reveals Himself under a Divine title. As the glorious I AM, He is present with his servants when they are gathered together for united worship. If He were not truly Divine, God omnipresent, He could not be with thousands of praying societies, assembled at the same time in different parts of the earth, nor could He confer the diversified blessings which their wants and circumstances require. In terms of this condescending assurance, He intimates that wherever a few devout worshippers assemble to call upon his name, they shall be introduced into the presence-chamber. God himself will be with them, ready to hear, merciful to pardon, almighty to deliver and save, and having inexhaustible fulness to supply abundantly every possible want. The promise is unconditional ; and, as it is expressed in the present tense, it implies that the gracious One who utters it is ready to receive and bless all who come to Him, infinitely willing to grant them the most familiar intercourse. If the Saviour be thus in the midst of two or three gathered together in his name, shall we not, both in regard to his honour and for our own unspeakable advantage, earnestly

¹ Exodus xx. 24.

² Psalm lxxxvii. 2.

desire this fellowship? If we really love Him, how can we keep away from the place where his company may certainly be expected? If we value his gracious presence, shall we not repair to the ordinance in which He engages that it will without fail be conferred?¹

5. The private Fellowship Meeting is sanctioned by *numerous beautiful scriptural examples.*

Approved examples of God's people assembling together for communion in devotion are everywhere presented in an attractive manner in the Sacred Word. They occur in the earliest part of the Inspired Record, and are to be met with till the close of revelation. The spiritual instincts of the renewed have been followed by believers in all ages; and in their holy association God has been honoured, and they themselves have enjoyed manifold blessings. When true religion was set up in the world, after the fall, it assumed the form of private social fellowship. In the days of Enoch, when the people of God made a distinct separation from the apostate descendants of Cain, it is said: "THEN BEGAN MEN TO CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD."² Whether we read this as in the received version, or as in the margin, "*Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord,*" it shows that the professors of true religion, at that early period, united together for prayer and spiritual fellowship. A public ministry was not appointed till many ages after; and we are not told of edifices having been erected for public worship. Notwithstanding, the servants of God recognize the duty and privilege of associating for united devotion. They were known from others as God's peculiar people. They called on the name of the Lord unitedly as well as individually. This was their honourable distinction and

¹ An aged pious female was a member of a prayer meeting, which was once numerously attended, and she continued to attend diligently when others had become indifferent, and had forsaken the assembling of themselves together. On one occasion, she went to the place of assembly, and remained the usual time, when no other person was present. A person who was aware of the circumstance inquired at her, "*What company she had!*" The characteristic reply was, "*The best of company. I had God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost present; and what is more, they assured me that they would meet with me again, the next night of meeting, and, whoever will be absent, I purpose to keep the appointment.*" This pious answer being told to the members who had fallen off, became the means of awakening them, and of exciting anew the desire after Christian fellowship. The prayer-meeting again became an object of attraction, and was attended with a revived devotional spirit.

² Genesis iv. 26.

character ; and thus were they preserved through many generations from the general corruption that speedily overspread the earth.

The family of Noah in the ark, and those of his sons, doubtless associated for united prayer and spiritual converse. In the singular and solemn position in which they were placed, when the flood was upon the face of the earth, miraculously preserved amidst the ruins of a world destroyed, "they spake often one to another;" and the Lord hearkened, and remembered them in mercy. The first service they performed when they came forth out of the ark—when Noah built an altar, and offered thereon a sacrifice—was one of social devotion, testifying their gratitude, and seeking blessings for the future ; while, in accepting it, God declared his gracious approval of the service.

The patriarchal worship was not only domestic, it was, likewise, select and social. The father of the family was king and priest of the household. At the same time, in many instances, he presided over numerous dependants, some of whom, as Eleazer in Abraham's family, and Deborah in Jacob's, were truly pious, and associated with the family in joint acts of religious service. Hence was it that the patriarchs, in their frequent sojournings, erected altars, and called them by significant names. These were not only designed to be a standing testimony against the surrounding idolatry, and a witness in behalf of true religion, but also a means of renewed dedication to those who were gathered into the household, and of obtaining for them promised covenant blessings. In the Book of Psalms, which has been appropriately styled "The Bible of believing experience," there are frequent distinct allusions to private religious intercourse as characteristic of the people of God. The psalmist, speaking as a believer, says : "*I am companion of them that fear thee ;*" and elsewhere he notices with interest fellow-travellers to Zion, "*Taking sweet counsel together, and going into the house of God in company.*"¹ The captives by "the rivers of Babylon" are represented as together suspending their harps upon the willows, and weeping while they "remembered Zion."² Daniel and his companions, when placed in peril of life, conferred together, and, in united prayer, desired "mercies of the God of heaven."³ Their joint supplications were heard, and not only were they themselves preserved, and made the instruments of preserving others from destruction, but the

¹ Psalm cxix. 63 ; lv. 14. ² Psalm cxxxvii. 1. ³ Daniel ii. 18.

discoveries which were communicated to them were rendered singularly subservient to the advancement of the Divine glory, and of the cause of true religion. In the days of Malachi, as we have seen, "the fearers of the Lord" were distinguished from a declining and ungodly generation by associating for private religious fellowship, and were honoured with special approval and the assurance of eminent blessing.

Under the increased light and privileges of the new economy, the institution of select prayerful fellowship is recommended and enforced by the most impressive and attractive examples. Our Lord himself is presented as our ever bright and blessed Model ; and He who guarantees to all succeeding generations his gracious presence to two or three assembled in his name, showed, while He tabernacled on earth, his special delight in private fellowship with his disciples. As He went in and out with them, some of the most tender and affecting manifestations of his glory were made in connection with retired assemblies for private intercourse and communion. Thus, the memorable interview on the Mount of Transfiguration was of the nature of *a select prayer-meeting*. When celestial visitants conversed with the three favoured disciples, and the Great Master of assemblies was there, the evangelist specially records that it was "*as he prayed*" He was transfigured, and his raiment became "white and glistening." This memorable display of the Redeemer's glory, so affecting as preparatory to his deep abasement shortly to follow, so fraught with important significance to all future ages, was made to a private social meeting. What a powerful recommendation is thus given to the continual observance of such an institution ! It is, moreover, observable, that when our Lord, during his public ministry, was employed in preaching and working miracles. He frequently led his disciples into scenes of retired fellowship ; and that He chose such private intercourse for imparting to them more fully his mind, and for communicating to them the meaning and design of his instructions. Thus He dealt with them as a considerate and compassionate parent with his children. The tender emotions of his heart gushed forth, and the combined graces of his character appeared in the most attractive lustre. On one occasion he addressed his disciples : "*Come ye yourselves into a desert place, and rest awhile.*"¹ Thus He spoke as knowing their frame, declaring his desire to open his heart to them unreservedly, and intimating the necessity to them

¹ Mark vi. 31.

of more private intercourse than they could enjoy in attending upon his public ministrations. Frequently is He said in the Gospels to reserve the unfolding of the meaning of the parables which He spoke to this private fellowship.¹ The disciples looked with desire to this retired, select fellowship, to have their darkness removed, and their doubts solved; and with peculiar readiness and condescending familiarity, our Lord met, and even anticipated their desires. "When they were alone He expounded all things to his disciples." In the presence of the multitudes, He made the most wonderful displays of his power and Godhead, and He spoke as never man spake. But it was in the retired meeting for private fellowship with his disciples that He delighted to unfold to them all his heart, and to discover to them his unspeakable tenderness. Thus does the Redeemer yet honour the private fellowship meeting. Even in glory, He remembers the scenes of intercourse with his people while on earth, and his delights are still with the sons of men. While He blesses the proclamation of his truth, and honours the public ordinances of Zion, his servants that desire to know his will, obtain, in social fellowship, more familiar intercourse with the Beloved. Their doubts are resolved, their fears dispelled. They experience the sweetness of the Word in plain and personal application—the "secret of the Lord" is with them, and He shows them his covenant.

It is observable that instances of the largest outflowings of the Redeemer's Spirit were in scenes of such private fellowship. Thus, when He expressed what has been appropriately termed "the rest and repose" of his holy soul, it was upon an occasion of this kind.² He entered also upon his embittered agony in the fellowship of a few chosen followers; and the inspired narrative plainly intimates that, in the same place, He had frequently had communion with his disciples. The traitor knew where to find Him, for "Jesus often resorted thither with his disciples."³ He was to suffer alone, and neither man nor angel could share with Him his unspeakable sorrows, or the glory of his victory. But He desired support and comfort in the immediate prospect of his agony from private fellowship with disciples whom He loved, and to this He clung even to the moment that the fearful command was to be executed: "Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

¹ See Matthew xiii. 36; Mark ix. 28; xiii. 3, 4; iv. 34.

² Luke x. 21-23.

³ John xviii. 2.

"With desire," said He, "have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer."¹ What a powerful motive is thus presented for us too to desire fellowship with the saints, and to resort to places and scenes of prayer and spiritual intercourse with them, even when exposed to trials, or when entering upon severe conflicts and sufferings !

After our Lord's resurrection, and on the establishment of the New Testament economy, his example and that of his saints exhibit, in a remarkable manner, the blessing from above resting upon assemblies for private social worship. In the evening of the day of his resurrection, when his disciples were assembled in an upper room, the Redeemer came into the midst, and said, "*Peace be unto you,*" and He confirmed and encouraged them as "*He showed unto them his hands and his side.*"² Eight days after, when they were again convened for united worship, He appeared among them, dispelled the unbelief of Thomas, and displayed in the most affecting manner his Divine condescension and glory. The disciples were commanded, at his ascension, to tarry at Jerusalem, and wait the promise of the Spirit. For ten days they continued in united prayer and spiritual converse ; and, as the blessing vouchsafed for obedience, and in answer to prayer, the Spirit descended like "floods upon the dry ground" on the day of Pentecost. This was the commencement of the new economy—the begun "ministration of the Spirit ;" and it deserves to be remarked, that it stands in immediate connection with the exercises of a select private fellowship meeting.

In the inspired history of the Book of Acts, we have several lovely instances of attendance on this institution, and of the blessed effects flowing from its observance. 'There seems to us to be no doubt that for a time after the memorable effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the multitude of the disciples thus principally cultivated holy fellowship. They could not assemble for public worship in one place, or even in several ; and neither could they command at once accommodation for public ministrations, nor would their enemies, who had all authority in their hands, have permitted such assemblies. But they "continued in prayer and in fellowship" by fraternal intercourse, from house to house ; and the body of believers edified itself in love by daily intercourse in private societies. Two instances of the blessing upon such fraternal associations occur in a subsequent part of the same Inspired Record, and are

¹ Luke xxii. 15.

² 1 John xx. 20.

striking from their connection with the planting and trials of the primitive Church. In the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, when Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, he went to Mary's house, as to a place of well-known resort, where many were assembled praying. Connected with his singular deliverance, it is said that "*prayer was made by the Church continually.*" The original word here used has been said to denote an action continued without interruption; and it is alleged by some expositors, that this refers to different prayer-meetings being assembled at different hours at various places throughout Jerusalem. As one concluded social religious exercises, another convened; and thus united prayer was kept up without ceasing, in behalf of the Lord's servant, until he obtained deliverance. The social and earnest prayers of a suffering Church thus came up into God's holy temple, and an immediate answer burst asunder Peter's chains, and "delivered him out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."¹ His repairing at once to Mary's house to a prayer-meeting indicated the apostle's desire after private social fellowship with brethren, and his conviction of its excellence. It was eminently befitting, moreover, that to the assembled disciples should be thus declared the efficacy of united prayer, and that they should be encouraged in all future time, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together.

The first triumphs of the Gospel in Europe were in connection with the private society for prayer. At Philippi, where Paul and Silas on the Sabbath-day repaired to the river side to a place "where prayer was wont to be made," the Lord "opened Lydia's heart to attend to the things spoken of Paul."² Thus the first trophy of the Saviour's grace in Europe is found in a retired assembly for prayer. There Divine light beams into her mind, and there the great work began which was to render the quarter of the globe which we inhabit enlightened, powerful, and free, and which was to spread the knowledge of salvation to the ends of the earth. What a scene of surpassing interest is the retired prayer-meeting by the river side at Philippi! How greatly honoured are its *female* members! What an encouragement does this instance present for ministers to associate in such an ordinance with praying people! May we not anticipate that the future glorious triumphs of the Gospel will take place in a similar connection; and that when Christians, in praying assemblies, shall agree to ask the Lord, He

¹ Acts xii. 11.

² Acts xvi. 14.

will then give the heathen to the Son for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession !

Lastly. THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S SAINTS bears ample testimony to the Divine acceptance of united prayer, and to the precious benefits of such fellowship. God has unequivocally declared in his Word, that the joint prayers of his people shall be heard and answered. He has frequently shown this in his gracious Providence ; and the heartfelt experience of saints has fully illustrated the truth of God's promise and Divine grace displayed in its fulfilment. The two sorrowful disciples journeying to Emmaus were constrained, from the testimony of experience, to say, "*Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?*"¹ So many who have delighted in the fellowship meeting have had the *secret witness* that the Lord was in the midst of them, and that, in the fullest sense, it was good to be there.

In these assemblies, fellow-saints have enjoyed unrestrained and loving intercourse. They have taken "sweet counsel" together. Their words of spiritual converse have ministered grace to the hearers, and have been like the best wine to the Beloved, which "goes down sweetly," "causing the lips of them that are asleep to speak." New light has been thrown upon the Word, and the power of the Spirit has been present, working convictions of sin, dispelling fears and doubts, and filling the heart with joy and peace in believing. The support of Christian sympathy has been largely experienced ; while the warm love of the brethren has been felt in all its soothing, elevating, and transforming influence. The prayers of saints, whose hearts have been brought into a blessed agreement by the same spirit of adoption, have had power with God, and prevailed. Answers of prayer have been earnestly looked for, and in cases not a few actually realized. United praises offered in "sweet psalms" have been found an offering of a "sweet smelling savour," acceptable through Jesus Christ ; and God has come in wondrous condescension to "inhabit the praises of his people." To use the beautiful language of one who powerfully exhibited the obligations and value of private fellowship meetings by his writings, and whose own lovely example strikingly enforced the lessons of spiritual wisdom which he taught : "The enlarged effusion of the heart in prayer, the elevation of the mind in praise, and the harmonious-

¹ Luke xxiv. 32.

ness of views, of desires, or of joy, have sometimes made these occasions memorable in recollection, and they have shed a lustre on the darker moments of a Christian's life. And even when not attended with high excitement of feeling, there has been experience of a sweet tranquillity and holy calm, which has soothed the spirit amid the bustle and turmoil of the occupations of life. The night of the fellowship meeting has been often anticipated with longings, and remembered with peculiar delight; and when removed by distance, or by infirmities, from such opportunities, the saints have felt refreshment in calling to remembrance the happy moments that have been thus enjoyed; and when their companions have been removed from them into another world, death, instead of breaking their fellowship, appears rather to have endeared and exalted it, while those left behind look at things unseen, and come to "the spirits of just men made perfect."¹

The Divine approval of private social fellowship is thus shown not only in the declarations of the Word, but likewise by the work of grace in the hearts and lives of believers, and by God's special providence towards them. In connection with spiritual exercises in these assemblies, "the grace that bringeth salvation" has been imparted and increased. The blessing from above has descended "like the dew upon Zion's hill," and believers have been edified and comforted; it has been found "good and pleasant" for brethren to dwell together in unity; and an influence at once salutary and powerful has gone forth from their intercourse, to bless the Church and the world. How many holy purposes have been formed in the humble prayer-meeting! How many benevolent plans have been laid and carried into vigorous execution, which have been owned of God to bring down the power of darkness and sin in the world, and to promote the Divine glory! The saints of a former age who earnestly longed for Christian fellowship, and who felt its unspeakable value in seasons of conflict and trial, were accustomed to style the social meeting, "*A trysting-place for the Beloved.*" Martyrs when on the scaffold, bidding adieu to all that was dear to them on earth, lingered with fond interest on scenes of hallowed intercourse with brethren in Christ; and the exclamation, "Farewell, sweet Fellowship Meetings!" was among the last testimonies uttered by men "of whom the world was not worthy," when they were entering the world of glory. These meetings have been pre-eminently

¹ *Private Social Prayer*: a Sermon by Andrew Symington, D.D., p. 21.

places where Christ and his people have held near and delighted intercourse. In all ages, they have been the nurseries of earnest and influential piety. Like the "fleece" of Gideon, they have been saturated with the dew of heaven, while the rest of the ground has been parched and dry. As feeding in "the beds of spices," the Beloved is here—to mature and accept the fruits which Himself has produced, and to "gather lilies" for his garland of glory.¹ The obligations to observe the ordinance of stated private fellowship thus rank among the most weighty and constraining that are addressed to Christian sensibility. The voice of nature and enlightened reason demand such an institution, while the cravings and recognized wants of God's people point to it as needful and indispensable. Divine appointment and approval give it a lofty sanction. The example of the saints of God in all ages powerfully recommends the practice of private social fellowship; and their experience of eminently beneficial results from engaging in it, concurs to enforce, by motives the most affecting, attendance on this ordinance. The institution is to be regarded as not less a valuable privilege than an important duty. The glory of God, the honour of Zion's King, the revival and comfort of believers, the blessing of the Church, and the spiritual renovation of the world, all may be greatly promoted by the private social fellowship of the people of God. Obligations more powerful and affecting cannot possibly unite to urge the diligent observance of any ordinance. Claiming an interest in Christ, the Well-Beloved, and going forth to meet Him, where He has assured us of his presence and blessing, we should seek to have communion in the "garden of nuts," joyfully declaring as the Spouse—"*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.*"²

¹ Song vi. 2.

² Song iv. 6.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY OF FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

THE history of associations for spiritual fellowship dates from a very early period, and can be traced through the annals of the Church in various countries, and in all past ages. It is inseparably connected with the life and progress of true religion. Seasons of revival have been distinguished by meetings for united prayer and holy converse among those who were awakened by the Spirit, or who have been made at such times to experience the joys of God's salvation. Equally conspicuous has been the desire to unite in private communion by faithful witnesses for truth, in periods of trial and persecution. When devoted ministers have been cut off or driven away, and the assemblies in the sanctuary have been forcibly suppressed, the sufferers have cultivated endeared fellowship in private; and in remote retirements and lone hiding-places, they have fanned the flame of earnest piety. While exposed to common afflictions, in loving intercourse with each other, they have realized fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; and their prayers and praises, poured forth from oppressed and yet joyful hearts, have come up in remembrance before God, and have drawn down upon themselves and others manifold blessings. We have seen that, in the earliest times of the inspired history of the Church, the profession of true religion was connected with its friends separating from others, and, in private fellowship, "calling on the name of the Lord." During the patriarchal dispensation there is evidence that the same ordinance of social worship existed. The *altars* which the patriarchs built in their sojourning in Canaan, and around which they collected their families and dependants for acts of united worship, were at once the means of spiritual communion, and a witness to the surrounding heathen of the nature and excellence of Divine revelation. The private fellowship of believers continued among God's ancient people till the last days of the Hebrew commonwealth. In times of defection

and apostasy in Israel, and when the faithful had to endure persecution, they associated for mutual support and consolation. The "four hundred prophets" shut up in a cave by Obadiah, in the reign of the idolatrous Ahab, doubtless took counsel together—spoke of Zion's wrongs, and of the covenant of their fathers forsaken—and sought, in earnest prayer, that the Lord would bring back to the land his departed glory. Thus, too, the captives in Babylon solaced their griefs, by recalling the stirring memories of the past, and hopefully anticipating the future, as they fixed their eye upon bright predictions, and sought in prayer their accomplishment. It deserves to be remembered that, by their captivity in Babylon, the Jewish people were completely weaned from idolatry; and this may be ascribed as much to the blessing upon their fraternal intercourse, as to their witnessing the gross idolatrous practices which prevailed in the land of their captivity.

After the return from Chaldea, private fellowship appears to have been a stated and distinguishing part of the worship of the ancient Church until the close of the dispensation. Besides synagogues for the reading and expounding of the law, there were *Proseuchæ*, or retired places for solitary or united prayer. Such, it seems likely, the fearers of the Lord in Malachi's day frequented when they spake often one to another, and when the record of their believing converse was registered in the "book of remembrance." Our Lord himself, it is thought, had recourse to such places, sacred to prayer, when He "went up to a mountain to pray," and when He took his disciples apart for rest, and that He might impart to them fuller and more familiar instruction.

The "Church in the house" frequently mentioned in the Book of Acts and in the apostolic epistles, was, in primitive times, an institution for private Christian fellowship, in many instances, even more than for the exercise of the ministry, or for public worship. In the early trials through which the Church had to pass, and during the long period of Pagan persecution, assemblies for social worship were the means of preserving the truth, and of invigorating the piety and animating the hearts of Christian confessors. To such scenes of hallowed fraternal intercourse the persecuted people of God had recourse when faithful shepherds were cut off, and when they were denied access to public ordinances; and from these they came forth to bid defiance to the rage of the enemy, and to witness to the death a good confession. The records of the *Church*

in the *Catacombs*, so singularly brought to light in late years, shows that when the power of imperial Rome was wielded against the religion of Christ, his Church found a secure shelter among the tombs of believing brethren; and received nourishment, and comfort too, from the private communion of saints in feeding on the Word, and in united prayer and praise.¹ Through many succeeding ages, when Papal Rome rose up to carry on the work of the red dragon in persecuting the saints, the life of the Church was preserved, in retired meetings for Christian fellowship, and her faith and love strengthened. When the enemy sought to devour the "Man-child," the woman, with two great wings of an eagle, is carried into the wilderness to a strong place prepared for her by God; and there "they feed her" until the throne of wickedness shall have been subverted, and the power of Antichrist broken.²

The Waldenses, who preserved Divine truth in its purity when Christendom was overrun with antichristian corruptions, and were true to their motto, "*Lux in tenebris*,"³ maintained a faithful profession, and enjoyed the communion of saints in meetings for prayer and spiritual converse. Thus did they animate one another to continue steadfast in their separation from the Romish apostasy; and by the strength derived from such fellowship, they were excited and encouraged to singular and sustained efforts for the propagation of evangelical truth throughout various countries of Europe. When the savage persecutions of the Papacy destroyed their sanctuaries, and interdicted their public assemblies for worship,—when their humble but devoted "Barbes" were cut off, or forced into exile—and when, by the rage of the enemy, the Waldenses were expelled in a body out of their native country,—in all emergencies they had recourse to meetings for united prayer, as the great means of support and relief under long-continued and severe oppression, and as the divinely-approved way of animating the hope of future deliverance. Ecclesiastical history records the marked attention of these early witnesses to this ordinance at different periods of their eventful history; and there can be no doubt that to it, in a large measure, are to be ascribed their remarkable unity in faith, and in a godly practice, and their heroic constancy in suffering. In the latter period of the Waldensian trials, shortly before the dawn of the Reforma-

¹ See the interesting volume, *The Church in the Catacombs*, by Charles Maitland, Esq.

² Revelation xii. 6.

³ Light in darkness.

tion, when "darkness that might be felt" had settled down upon the nations of Europe, when faithful witnesses had been almost wholly exterminated, when the voice of a public protest against Rome's idolatry and oppression was nowhere distinctly heard throughout Western Christendom, we have on record an affecting testimony to the value which the remnant of these ancient confessors still set upon the social prayer-meeting. It is related that at that time, one lonely *society*, which met in one of the secluded valleys of the Alps—brooding over the low condition of Christendom, and deeply concerned to see if there was any quarter whence deliverance might be expected—after prayerful consultation, despatched *four* of their number, with instructions to travel north, south, east, and west, to inquire if there were any churches that held fast an evangelical profession, and maintained separation from the general corruption. After an absence of more than a year, these delegates returned with the melancholy intelligence that they had found none. Still these "marked ones," who sighed and mourned for "the abominations of the land," did not relinquish prayer, or *forsake the assembling of themselves together*. Though we have no distinct record on the subject, there is every reason to conclude that they continued in deep seclusion and retirement—hidden from the rage of the enemy—to cultivate fraternal fellowship, and, in united prayer, to give utterance to the sorrows of their heart, and to look in faith for a time of deliverance.¹

There are *two periods* in the history of Protestantism in every country in which the reformed doctrines took root, that were eminently distinguished by unions for Christian fellowship and prayer. These were, *at the commencement of the movement*, when men were called to struggle with earnest and heartfelt convictions, and had likewise to contend against numerous powerful enemies; and again, *when the violence of persecution was excited* to root out the truth, and to extirpate faithful witnesses. At these times, when the awful realities of religion were felt stirring the soul, and its power was tested in making great sacrifices, and in contending against manifold difficulties, the fellowship meeting was the chosen resort of faithful witnesses, where the Divine presence was sought and enjoyed; and from such a hallowed scene came forth many devoted men, strong in the faith, nerved with resolution and courage to

¹ See "Letter of the Waldensian Churches to Acolampadius," in *Scott's Continuation of Milner's History of the Church of Christ*, vol. i. p. p. 134, 135.

attempt and suffer all things for the cause of Christ. Thus, in almost every country, was the infant Reformation nursed and strengthened, amidst manifold conflicts and dangers, till it attained maturity; and before its progress opposition melted away. In Germany, Switzerland, and other continental states, those who embraced the truth sought fellowship together; and in cases not a few, the elements of a living Church were collected and arranged before they were favoured with the voice of a living preacher, or with the dispensation of public ordinances. At seasons, too, when the cause of the Reformation appeared to be in jeopardy, the Protestant leaders gathered fresh courage to go forward, bold in the goodness of their cause, and in Divine strength imparted in answer to earnest and united prayer. It is related that Luther on one occasion addressed an assembly of dispirited reformers, who were brooding over recent disasters, declaring that he would never despair of Christ's cause, for that lately, in passing through a village, he had found a number of women and young persons assembled, praying for the work of reformation. As the English Reformation was eminently the fruit of reading the Word, so the first English reformers—Tyndal, Bilney, Frith, and Latimer—soon as they received the truth, assembled together for spiritual conference, and mutual exhortation and prayer. Students of Cambridge and Oxford resorted to the prayer-meeting, to increase their acquaintance with the precious truths of the Word, to impart to fellow-believers their new-born feelings and views, and to take sweet counsel together respecting the propagation of the truth which had imparted to themselves light, and liberty, and comfort. As the light spread throughout England, many secret disciples derived from the same ordinance support and courage; and before the way was opened for the public preaching of the Word, multitudes were thus prepared for boldly confessing Christ, and suffering for his name's sake.¹

At a memorable period of the history of the Reformed Church in France, the value of association for Christian fellowship and united prayer was singularly shown. But for such an ordinance to resort to in a season of great trial and difficulty, the truth would have been borne down, and the cause of the Reformation had become extinct in that kingdom. It was after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes—when the most savage cruelties were inflicted upon the Protestants of France—when everything that an idolatrous and immoral priesthood could

¹ See D'Aubigné's *History of the English Reformation*.

contrive, and a flagitious court could execute, was done to lead them to apostatize, and to blot out their name for ever. About the same time that the witnesses for "*Christ's Crown and Covenant*" in Scotland were mourning in sackcloth after the death of the faithful Renwick, means were tried to revive from the dead the Reformed Church of France; and there, as in Scotland, deliverance came—not by human might nor power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, given in answer to prayer. After the wild and irregular warfare of the Camisards had effected no deliverance, and when the condition of the reformed in France appeared dark and hopeless in the extreme, *Antoine Court*—then a youth, who has been justly styled, "THE RESTORER OF PROTESTANTISM IN FRANCE"—was raised up, and by contriving and executing singularly judicious measures, amidst uncommon difficulties, became the instrument of re-organizing the Reformed Church in his native country. The historian of *Protestantism in France* thus relates the plans and devoted efforts of this excellent man, who, when only sixteen or seventeen years of age, thoroughly embarked in his perilous enterprise, and never rested till he had accomplished his noble purpose:—

"Four conditions appeared to him to be necessary for the re-organization of the churches: Regular religious assemblies; a direct and inflexible combat against the disorders of the inspired; the restoration of discipline by means of the consistories, conferences, and synods; and, finally, the formation of a body of pastors."

"Antoine Court established, in the first place, *prayer-meetings* wherever he could shelter his head. They were but scanty in the beginning. 'It was a great thing,' he says in an *Apologetic Memoir*, written forty years afterwards, 'when by force of cares and solicitation, I could induce six, ten, or a dozen of persons to follow me to some mountain cave, or deserted grange, or to the open country, to render homage to God, and to hear the discourse I wished to address to them. What a consolation, however, it was to me to find myself, in 1744, in assemblies of 10,000 souls, in the same spot where I had with difficulty gathered together, during the first meetings of my ministry, fifteen, thirty, sixty, or at most a hundred persons!'"

There speedily followed this establishment of prayer-meetings the organization of *synodical conferences*. The first of these was held on the 21st August 1715, eleven days after the death of the king, who thought to have crushed the French Reformation.

These were held in the depth of a cavern, or in an isolated hut; as, if they had been discovered, all the members, or at least the preachers, would have been capitally punished. The regulations adopted for these assemblies and conferences were at once judicious and scriptural. "Elders were entrusted with the duty of watching over their flocks, of convoking assemblies in suitable places, of providing for the safety of the pastors, and of making collections for prisoners and the poor. Women were prohibited from speaking in the meetings of the faithful. The Bible was enjoined as the sole rule of faith, and individual revelations were rejected as anti-scriptural and dangerous."¹ "*The Assemblies of the Witnesses*," as they were called, were held in open day, when the danger was not excessive; at night, when persecution was vigorous, in some wild retreat, or in rocky nooks and quarries, during adverse weather. The summonses were issued only a few hours before the meeting, and by emissaries of the most trustworthy character. Sentinels were placed about the heights, but unarmed, so that they might give the signal of the approach of soldiers.

When the prayer-meetings merged into assemblies where ministers attended, and dispensed public ordinances, the worship of the desert was conducted with scriptural simplicity—prayer, singing of psalms, preaching, administration of the Lord's Supper, at stated times, "a simple worship, easily practicable everywhere, and which required no more preparation than that of 'the upper room furnished,' in which the apostles and primitive Christians assembled at Jerusalem."

"This simplicity, however, possessed a charm of nobility and grandeur—the calm of solitude suddenly broken by the

¹ The regulations adopted at these synodical conferences, aimed to promote the power of religion in all relations, and partook, too, of the nature of a solemn covenant engagement—"Fathers of families were exhorted to cultivate worship at home *three times a day*, and to consecrate at least *two hours to devotion* on Sabbath. Those who committed grave offences were to be censured in public, after three admonitions in private. The pastors were recommended carefully to explain all the articles of religion, to procure information respecting vices more common in each district, with a view to their correction, and to assemble every six months, for the purpose of intercommunication. If any pastor caused scandal to his brethren, or endangered them by his hasty zeal, he was to be immediately deprived of his appointment. An engagement was entered into to succour those who had suffered in the cause of religion, but to give no assistance to any who exposed themselves to persecution by their rashness."—*Synods of 1716 and 1717.*

voice of prayer—the songs of the faithful mounting to the invisible Being, in the presence of the magnificence of nature—the minister of Jesus Christ invoking his God, like the faithful of the primitive Church, for the oppressors, who raged because they had not yet led them to the scaffold—poor peasants, humble artificers, who, laying aside their tools of labour for a day, felt anxiety for nought but the sublime interests of the faith of the life to come. The common sentiment of danger which placed their souls continually in the presence of their Sovereign Judge, endued all the assemblies of the wilderness with the serious magnanimity which allies itself so well with the teaching of Christianity.”¹

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, in the early part of its history, felt the benefit of the friends of truth associating together in private prayer-meetings. During the memorable period of the First Reformation, those who had abandoned the Romish apostasy, and who were, in consequence, exposed to manifold hardship and suffering, thus strengthened and encouraged one another against the common enemy, and realized the supports and consolations of true religion. From the death of Patrick Hamilton till Knox, on his return from the continent, in concurrence with the Lords of the Congregation, and other public servants of God, fully organized the Church in some of the leading cities, the Protestants, while unsupplied with a faithful ministry, thus met and spoke often one to another. Especially, in many country districts, and in remote localities, the cause of the Reformation was nursed into life and vigour, and the souls of believers were edified, by the reading of the Scriptures, and by united prayer and praise.²

¹ *History of the Protestants of France*, by E. De Felice.

² In the early history of the Reformation in Scotland, we find many striking instances of the value of private assemblies for prayer, in furthering the incipient movement. Thus, about the year 1546, a number of gentlemen met in a house in Mid-Lothian, and after united prayer and mutual consultation, drew out and subscribed a bond in which they pledged their lives, fortunes, and reputation, for the preservation and protection of “the blessed Evangel.” This is the first case of *covenanting* that we have on record in connection with the establishment of Protestantism in Scotland. “About the year 1556, a number of private Christians who had been brought to the knowledge of the truth (under the labours of the Reformers), met together for religious conference, the reading of the Scriptures, and prayer. This might be said to be the beginning of the Evangelical Church in Scotland. About this time they had no ministers, and the sacraments were not dispensed. ‘Convinced,’ says Dr M’Crie, ‘of the necessity of

¹ *Life of Knox*, second edition, vol. i. p. 229.

When prelacy and arbitrary power combined to deprive the Church of Scotland of her Presbyterian liberties and privileges—when faithful ministers were driven into banishment, and the people were bereaved of their loved pastors—this primitive ordinance supplied the “flock in the wilderness” with spiritual nourishment and comfort. During the lengthened persecution which followed the adoption of the Perth Articles in 1618, our Scottish forefathers had recourse to private prayer-meetings as a means of preserving the truth, and of mutual support and encouragement; and as the oppressions of prelacy increased, in those assemblies they were animated to hold fast their profession, and to wait in hope for deliverance. We are informed that in the years which preceded the dawn of the Second Reformation—when the moderator’s chair in church courts was usurped by hireling bishops, and when faithful men could not meet publicly for deliberation, the friends of truth were accustomed to hold concerts for prayer, either by assembling in small numbers in different places, or by attending to the duty by mutual agreement, united in spirit and object, although not gathered together in one worshipping assembly. In this manner, too, days of fasting were appointed, once a quarter or more frequently, and strictly observed by thousands, though not in any public manner. These services were not in vain. The crying of the prisoners ascended on high, and entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. At length, He remembered for his oppressed people his holy covenant; and by singular displays of power, He arose to confound their adversaries, and to work for his Church manifold salvation.

In this country, especially, did Fellowship Prayer-Meetings, at this particular period, prove a source of abundant and lasting blessing. The Scottish Presbyterian ministers, who were forced to leave their native land, from their conscientious opposition to prelatic usages, brought with them to the northern province of Ireland the standard of a faithful testimony for Divine truth, and through the blessing from on high upon their abundant labours, the wilderness was speedily converted into a fertile order and discipline in their societies, and desirous to have them organized, so far as within their power, agreeably to the institution of Christ, they proceeded to choose elders for the inspection of their manners, to whom they promised subjection, *and deacons for the collection and distribution of alms to the poor.* Edinburgh was the first place in which this order was established.—See *A Treatise on the Office of Deacon*, by the Rev. John G. Lorimer, D.D.

land. A *revival* of religion took place, so powerful and remarkable that the fame of it reached distant countries, and the effects of it are yet discernible in the striking contrast between the moral, spiritual, and physical condition of Ulster, and that of other parts of the kingdom.¹ It is worthy of special remark, that this revival originated in connection with the private social prayer-meeting, and that it was carried forward through the same means. When the awakenings under the ministry of Glendinning took place at Oldstone, and in the district of the Six Mile Water, the proposal by a pious Scottish colonist to assemble for united prayer at his house, was gladly hailed by a number who had been brought under convictions of sin, and who were concerned about the spiritual destitution that prevailed around them. As these assemblies increased, the faithful ministers regarded it as their duty to direct the movement, and to use it as a means of still farther extending the cause of true religion. The private assemblies for united prayer merged into the "MONTHLY MEETINGS" held at Antrim, where a number of ministers and devoted men from various parts were accustomed first to meet together for prayer and Christian conference; and where, on the following day, the Word was preached with singular power to thousands who were hungering for the bread of life.²

Shortly after the commencement of the memorable period of the SECOND REFORMATION, the General Assembly, which met in Aberdeen in 1641, took under their consideration the subject of private social prayer-meetings. This assembly, under the apprehension that the practice of expounding Scripture, which was then frequently resorted to in these meetings, might lead

¹ See *Fleming on the Fulfilment of Scripture*, vol. ii. pp. 96, 97; Reid's *Hist. Presby. Ch. in Ireland*, vol. i. pp. 106-111; *Life and Characteristics of Rev. John Livingston*.

² The remembrance of these hallowed meetings was cherished long afterwards, and when prelate oppression and the Popish massacre of 1641 served to expel faithful ministers from the north of Ireland, and their attached flocks were deprived of the pure administration of public ordinances, and scattered, the prayer-meeting was resorted to as the grand means of supplying their spiritual destitution, and of light and refreshment in the cloudy and dark day. In subsequent times, too, the written or traditionary record of the blessed effects of these solemn assemblies has been of eminent advantage to the cause of true and undefiled religion; so that in times of trial, and wherever evangelical religion has been preserved in its purity, and the power of practical godliness has been displayed, these blessings have been sought and obtained by means of associations for united prayer and Christian fellowship.

to such extravagances as had characterized sectaries on the continent, or might prove an introduction to prelacy, passed an Act limiting family worship to the members of the household, and forbidding to expound the Scriptures except by ministers or candidates for the ministry. Yet it is worthy of remark that this did not amount to a prohibition of social prayer-meetings, when under proper regulations, and that the opposition to this ordinance of Christian fellowship was led by a person who, for unworthy conduct, was subsequently deposed from the ministry, who afterwards, in the times of persecution, accepted a bishopric from the profligate Charles II., and who wrote memoirs of Scottish affairs, which abound in misrepresentations and calumnies.¹ The subject of discussion at this assembly is thus placed in its proper light by the historian of the Church of Scotland:—

“During the domination of the prelatic party, many religious people had withdrawn from the ministry of men from whom they derived no spiritual instruction; but to supply the want to the utmost of their power, they had adopted the measure of meeting together in private, and engaging in reading the Scriptures, exhortation, and prayer, for their mutual edification. Several who had been in Ireland, and other countries for a considerable time, had become so confirmed in this custom, that even after the Glasgow Assembly, the abolition of prelacy, and the restoration of the purer and simpler modes of Presbyterian worship, they still continued their practice of holding these private religious meetings. The more pious ministers saw nothing offensive or improper in such private meetings of Christian worshippers; but there were others who looked on them with less favourable regard.”² It is judiciously remarked by the same author, that the discouragement shown to private fellowship meetings, at this time, produced afterwards the most injurious consequences. “This unseemly and ill-omened contention may be regarded as the first insertion of the wedge by which the Church of Scotland was afterwards rent asunder; and it deserves to be remarked that it was pointed and urged on by a prelatist.”³

When the prelatic persecution under Charles II. drove between

¹ This was Henry Guthrie, at that time minister of Stirling. See for his character, *Stevenson's History*; *M'Crie's Life of Henderson*; *Hetherington's History of Church of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 352.

² *Hetherington's History of Church of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 351.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

three and four hundred faithful Presbyterian ministers from their pulpits, and hiring curates were intruded upon their reluctant flocks, the value of private social prayer-meetings was again experienced, in upholding and comforting the servants of God in evil times. Thus were they fitted for patient endurance of privations and sufferings, and thus they were nerved for the noble conflict in which they engaged against Erastian power. In the latter part of the twenty eight years' persecution, when under the cruel and arbitrary measures of the Popish and bigoted James, the number of faithful witnesses was greatly reduced; and by indulgences, and every other means that antichristian policy could invent, apostasy and defection were encouraged, the few resolute Covenanters who remained had recourse to united prayer, and cultivated fraternal fellowship, as a precious means of spiritual improvement, and of preservation and safety amidst manifold danger and suffering. Hence they were called "*THE SOCIETY PEOPLE*;" and the history of this disastrous period, whether as written by persons friendly or unfriendly to their cause, bears unequivocal testimony that it was, in a great measure, owing to their cordial and intimate union, and to their faithful exertions, that "the precious truths of the Gospel were preserved, and that the civil and religious liberties of Britain were rescued from the grasp of despotic rulers."¹

Even the prejudiced Wodrow is forced to confess that the "*Society People*," and not the "*Indulged*," preserved in perilous times true Presbyterian principles; and though he blames them for maintaining extreme sentiments, and for extravagant practices, he admits that among them were the honest and faithful martyrs at the period which was significantly designated "*The killing time*." Hetherington, a much more candid and impartial historian, freely acknowledges the eminent advantages reaped by Scotland's suffering Church from association in prayer-meetings, and the obligations under which the nation lies to the example of faithfulness and heroic self-devotion exhibited by the "*Society People*." The following testimony is alike honourable to the head and heart of the writer:—"While Cargill perished on the scaffold, that determined band of Covenanters who had adhered to him were left without a minister, no man for a time daring to take up a position so imminently perilous. In this emergency, these fearless and high-principled men resolved to form themselves into a united body, consisting of *Societies* for worship and religious intercourse

¹ *Charter's Discourses.*

in those districts where they most abounded ; and for the more effectual preservation of their opinions, and security against errors, in the absence of a stated ministry, these smaller societies appointed deputies to attend a general meeting, which was empowered to deliberate upon all suggestions, and adopt such measures as the exigencies of the times required."

" From the fact that these people, in the absence of a stated ministry, formed themselves into societies for mutual religious intercourse and edification, they came to be designated the '*Society People*,' a term frequently applied to them by Wodrow, as that of '*Cameronians*' has been generally given to them by other historians. Superficial readers are liable to be misled by names, of the origin and application of which they have no accurate conception. But the affixing of a new name to a party is no sure proof that it has taken new grounds. That '*persecuted remnant*,' as they called themselves, had indeed taken up no new principles. The utmost that they can be justly charged with is, merely that they had followed up the leading principles of the Presbyterian and Covenanted Church of Scotland to an extreme point, from which the greater part of Presbyterians recoiled ; and that, in doing so, they had used language capable of being interpreted to mean more than they themselves intended. Their honesty of heart, integrity of purpose, and firmness of principle cannot be denied, and these are noble qualities ; and if they did express their sentiments in strong and unguarded language, it ought to be remembered that they did so in the midst of fierce and remorseless persecution, ill-adapted to make men really cautious in the selection of balanced terms, wherein to express their indignant detestation of that unchristian tyranny which was so fiercely striving to destroy every vestige of both civil and religious liberty."¹

¹ After the martyrdom of the youthful and truly illustrious Renwick, for a period of *seventeen or eighteen years*, the faithful party to which Dr Hetherington refers, were destitute of a public ministry, until the accession to their fellowship of the Rev. John M'Millan of Balmaghie.¹ During this period of lengthened persecution, they adopted no extreme or heterodox opinions—they maintained pure evangelical truth, and preserved scriptural and strict discipline, thus affording a striking instance of the value of a full scriptural confession, and of association in private prayer-meetings. A record of the proceedings of the "*GENERAL MEETINGS*," composed of delegates from the various scattered societies, that were held both before and subsequently to the death of Renwick, has been preserved in the rare work, entitled *Faithful Contendings*, which deserves to be better known and more widely circulated than it is, both on account of the valuable infor-

¹ Hetherington's *History of Church of Scotland*, vol. ii. pp. 122-124.

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH in these countries, which claims to inherit the principles, as it occupies the position, in relation to the civil and ecclesiastical establishments of the land, of the Society People, has carefully maintained, to the present day, the institution of Fellowship Prayer-Meetings. Under the Divine favour, this has been to this section of the Church a means of safety and extensive blessing. During the eighteenth century, when in these countries, and throughout continental Europe, evangelical religion everywhere declined, and purity of religious ordinances was generally undervalued, the Covenanting body held aloft a standard for the truths of the Gospel, maintained a faithful discipline, and the lives and conduct of its members were exemplary. These attainments were reached, not only in a state of complete separation from corrupt civil and ecclesiastical systems, but often amidst the positive hostility of persons in authority, and the apathy and opposition of the community, bent on backsliding and defection. The "Societies" in the Reformed Presbyterian Church have all along served to fan the flame of genuine piety among her members, as they have united them in fraternal bonds, been the birth-place of souls, and seminaries for the godly training of the young, and as the "beds of spices" where the Beloved feeds, and holds delighted communion with his people.

It deserves special observation, in tracing the history of private social prayer-meetings, that such assemblies have ever been found connected with *seasons of revival of religion*, and have been highly valued by those who have maintained practical godliness amidst prevailing defections; while the decline of serious religion has been frequently indicated by professors forsaking the assembling of themselves together. The late Dr M'Crie judiciously remarks: "Two things go to prove that professors of religion have been, in a great degree, strangers to heavenly desires—first, The rareness of religious conversation in their occasional discourse; secondly, The falling off of meetings for prayer and religious converse. Our fathers grudged not to abridge their hours of labour, and their hours of rest; they scrupled not, with the light of the mation that it contains, and because of the example which it furnishes of earnest and loving piety shining forth in the spirit and lives of a people, reduced, through the violence of persecution, to great outward privations and distresses. The letters of Sir Robert Hamilton, from his exile in Holland, to the Societies, give striking evidence of the spirituality, wisdom, and untiring activity of that excellent though much misrepresented witness for the royal prerogatives of the Redeemer.

moon and the stars, to travel, and to spend hours in a smoky hovel, that they might enjoy the foretaste of heaven upon earth; while we, with every accommodation and facility, will not go out of our houses or cross a street to enjoy the privilege. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. To what can we ascribe them but to earthliness of affection, distrust of God, and want of brotherly love?"¹

In all instances of powerful revival, meetings for social prayer and believing intercourse have been a precious fruit of the waterings of the Spirit; and they have, at the same time, been a powerful means of carrying forward the good work, and of rendering it productive of permanent benefit to the Church. Wherever the overwhelming importance of eternal interests has been felt, the awakened have been drawn to speak often one to another, and have been impelled to give utterance to the deep emotions of their hearts in united prayer. Both in former and later seasons of revival, assemblies for social spiritual fellowship have been a marked characteristic of the Spirit's gracious work, in quickening "the dry bones," and reviving the heritage of the Lord. Thus in England, under the ministry of Venn, and Walker, and Berridge, the awakened were formed into societies for prayer; and, by this means, the work begun was continued and extended to other districts.

One of Venn's converts at Huddersfield writes—"We had a meeting of the most pious at Mrs Scholefield's, once or twice a-week, about *twenty* of us, where a subject given out one time was discussed the next. One of us was the leader, and opened with prayer; afterwards he asked all round their opinions, and concluded with prayer. The meeting at Longwood had more than ours. There was another at Berrybrow, and one, a kind of general one, at the town."²

The awakenings which took place in various parts of England under the ministry of Wesley and Whitefield, led to the establishment of social prayer-meetings; and at a period when *within* the pale of the National Establishment, and *without* it, all was under the torpor of spiritual death, this organization was a powerful means of exciting earnest minds to pursue after eternal concerns, and to press them upon the serious attention of others. However defective and erroneous on some points is the doctrinal system of the followers of

¹ *Sermons*, by the late Dr M'Crie, p. 14.

² *History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles*, p. 29.

Wesley, there can be no doubt that to the practice of attending the weekly "class-meetings," each presided over by a "leader," they are, in a large measure, indebted for their remarkable union and increase; and that thus have been originated and sustained their wonderful exertions for propagating religion both throughout Christian and heathen countries.

One of the most important revivals of religion, when the effects are considered, is that which occurred in the principality of Wales, during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, under Howel Harris, and the Rev. Daniel Reynolds; and this was carried forward and fostered by means of private societies for prayer and religious conference. The Welsh, who had been previously left almost wholly neglected and in ignorance by the ministers of the Established Church when they were awakened, embraced the truth in its simplicity, attended upon ordinances administered with a large measure of scriptural purity, and exhibited a practice becoming the Gospel. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, as they are designated, have continued to be distinguished for a strict adherence to evangelical doctrine, and for godly practice, above any other class of Dissenters in England; and it is an honourable testimony borne to the inhabitants of the principality, that the time when the last "*Census of Religious Worship*" was taken, a much larger proportion of them was found attending upon public ordinances than of the inhabitants of any other part of England. It is related of Harris, who may be considered "the father" of the body, that "he frequently attended the meetings which the people held for the purpose of teaching each other to sing the praises of God, that he might thus have an opportunity of impressing them with a sense of their eternal state. On these occasions many were convinced of their sinfulness. This encouraged Mr Harris to establish regular meetings of serious persons, for religious conversation in several other places, and this was the commencement of the *Private Societies* which have ever since (taking into consideration the great importance and strictness attached to their observance) formed a principal feature by which the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists may be distinguished from every other denomination of professing Christians."¹ Rowlands availed himself of the same ordinance

¹ *History of Revivals*, p. 94. In the *Memoirs of the late Rev. Rowland Hill*, it is mentioned that in one of his last visits to the Societies in South Wales, he was much touched by, and often spoke of, the following little

to extend and perpetuate the revival; and when the Welsh Calvinistic body became organized as a distinct section of the Church of Christ, they embodied in their "CONSTITUTION AND FUNDAMENTAL REGULATIONS" the ordinance of *fellowship meetings*, and required the members to attend upon it with all diligence. It is, doubtless, owing to the punctuality with which this regulation is observed by the Welsh Calvinists, in the various places where they are scattered, that they are enabled to preserve among them the doctrines of the Gospel uncorrupted, and to maintain, above any other religious body in England, a strict scriptural discipline.'

The revivals at Cambuslang and Kilsyth, about the year 1742, were distinguished for meetings of the awakened for united prayer and Christian conference. Thus was the good work carried forward, convictions of sin were strengthened, evangelical light was increased, the souls of the godly were confirmed, and many were brought to rejoice in the hope of salvation. The power, extent, and salutary effects of the revival were the fruits, as much of the fervent prayers of those who had been brought to feel the unspeakable importance of Divine things, as of the faithful preaching of the Word. Solemn impressions impelled those who were quickened to "speak often one to another," and to pour out the fervent emotions of

incident. During the meeting of the Society a man, verging towards a hundred years old, raised himself from the corner in which he was reclining, and while he aided his feeble limbs by leaning on his trembling hands, he raised his quivering voice, and addressed himself to the young ministers, in his broken English, "Brethren, let me tell you this: I have heard Daniel Rowlands preach, and I heard him once say, 'Except your consciences be cleansed by the blood of Christ, you must all perish in the eternal fires.'" Rowlands had been more than half a century in glory; but here a voice, as from the grave, bore testimony to his faithfulness in proclaiming Christ, and in warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come.

' A striking instance of the facility afforded by meetings for united prayer and spiritual converse, for benevolent and decided exertion, occurred in the steps taken by the Welsh Calvinistic body in Liverpool, some years ago, for establishing a mission to the heathen. After frequent social conference, it was resolved that the members of the church should pledge themselves to abstain from all intoxicating drinks, and that the money thus saved should be religiously dedicated to the extension of the cause of Christ at home and abroad. The consequence was that, in a short time, two new houses of worship in connection with the body were erected in Liverpool and the neighbourhood, and a mission to India was commenced, which has since been sustained at an expense of some £1800 or £2000 annually, and which has already been instrumental in diffusing the knowledge of Christ throughout regions hitherto unvisited by Christian missionaries, and in gathering sinners to Christ.

their hearts in united prayers and in joyful praises ; while the power and beauty of true religion thus exemplified attracted others to join themselves to the Lord and his people.

In the recent remarkable revival which occurred in one of these parishes (Kilsyth) about ten or twelve years ago,¹ there was furnished another striking instance of the inseparable connection between living Christianity and the observance of social prayer-meetings. The Rev. Mr Burns, the pious minister of the parish, in giving an account of the revival, stated that at the time when the first serious impressions began to manifest themselves, there were two *dancing-schools*, some *political clubs*, and an *infidel association* in the village of Kilsyth, containing a population of some 2500 persons; while, throughout the whole parish, there were but *two prayer-meetings*, thinly and irregularly attended. As soon as the shower of the Spirit's influences descended, and men's minds became impressed with the unspeakable importance of spiritual things, the dancing-school and political and infidel associations were abandoned ; and, in a little time, no fewer than *sixty prayer-meetings* were established throughout the parish. Such, too, was the depth of religious impressions, that at one period of the revival, for a whole day or two, all worldly business was suspended in the village of Kilsyth—the overwhelming conviction of the worth of the soul and of the importance of salvation appearing to have taken exclusive possession of all minds.

From this induction, which might be largely extended, it is manifest that the universal judgment of the Church, in its best periods, is in favour of private social worship. This ordinance has been found by experience, and confessed, to be necessary to revive decayed religion, and to maintain and extend living Christianity. Wherever it has gone into disuse, practical religion has declined—the power of evangelical truth has ceased to be felt, and grievous error has entered and made progress. Private social worship, and meetings for this object, uniformly languish and go into disuse, when error and worldliness make inroads upon the Church. This has been remarkably observable among the Protestant communities of the Continent, as well as throughout many Protestant churches in these countries ; and just in proportion as the institution is properly observed or neglected—either by some sections of the Church rather than others, or by persons in the same religious connection above others—so may we mark the vigour or decline of a religious

¹ This occurred so long before the first edition of this Work was published.

profession and of practical godliness. To any reflective mind, who meditates either upon the statements of the Inspired Word, or on the method of the Divine government, the reason of this must be apparent. Social prayer and private fellowship is a service due to the Saviour who purchased the Church with his own blood, and who has established the "household of faith." It is rendered necessary by the common wants, temptations, dangers, and duties of those who belong to the spiritual family; and it is in the highest degree fit and right, as a due expression of the sense of benefits received, and a blessed means of extending and perpetuating scriptural privileges. Of the manifold *benefits* resulting from social private fellowship we shall hereafter speak. Meanwhile, it must be apparent that the Church has, in all past periods, been largely indebted to this institution for securing her most precious privileges, and for the enjoyment and continuance of special blessings. Future eras of trial and of enlargement and victory, it should seem to us, will be yet more strikingly marked by joyful attendance upon meetings for private fraternal communion. The value and efficiency of association to promote union and confidence, and to effect desired purposes, are now acknowledged in almost all human pursuits, civil, commercial, political, and literary. In the coming work, struggles and conflicts of the Church, prayerful association will be largely tried, and the fruits will be salutary in an eminent degree. "People shall be gathered together, and the kingdoms to serve the Lord."¹ *"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."*²

¹ Psalm cii. 22.

² Zechariah viii. 20-23.

CHAPTER IV.

SUBJECTS OF CHRISTIAN INTERCOURSE IN FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

SOME of the special designs for which Christians associate together in fellowship meetings are, that the knowledge of Divine things may be increased; that believers may mutually help and encourage one another in the ways of godliness; that by the due performance of all relative duties brotherly love and sympathy may be promoted; and that all the members of the Church may have fellowship one with another, in the spiritual gifts and graces with which they are endowed. "EDIFYING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE" is not only the duty, but likewise the privilege of those who profess to belong to the family of faith; and the institution of social prayer is eminently adapted to promote this great object, and to advance those who delight in it to "the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus."

The intercourse of Christians in stated associations for converse and united prayer, which should be wholly *spiritual*, is carried on through the Word, by means of converse on the truth—in the way of mutual instruction, exhortation, reproof, and consolation; by imparting the experience of the heart, in relation to the operations of Divine grace, and to supports enjoyed in duty and trial; and by joint prayer and praise. Believers come together that they may themselves enjoy benefit, and that they may communicate benefit to others. In terms of the invitation of Moses to Hobab, his brother-in-law, they welcome others to their holy fellowship—"Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." They offer, too, the same powerful motive and encouragement—"It shall come to pass, yea, it shall come to pass, that whatever good the Lord will do unto us, we will even do unto you." This "good" which the Lord does unto His people they impart to each other, first of all by spiritual

¹ Numbers x. 29, 30.

converse, then by prayer with and for one another, and by joint praise and thanksgiving. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Their intercourse by speech was about nothing trivial or worldly, but about matters of infinite importance; for the Lord himself, whom they loved and served, listened with interest, and recorded in his "book of remembrance" the subject of their intercourse.

SPIRITUAL CONVERSE.—To maintain this converse aright, Christians should regard their assembling together for social intercourse as a holy ordinance appointed by God for the promotion of his glory, and for their own spiritual advantage and that of others. They should therefore watch, and carefully guard against the introduction of any matters or words that are unsuitable. They should speak to one another what they have learned from the Word of God, what they have already spoken to God himself in prayer, and what has been to themselves matter of heartfelt experience. They should be able, in all that they say in the assembly of the brethren, virtually to declare: "We have believed, therefore have we spoken;" and it should be apparent to those who have intercourse with them, that "out of the abundance of the heart their tongue speaks."

The spiritual converse, moreover, of those who meet in stated fellowship, should *not be conducted in the way of authority or formal address*, but should be *free and familiar*,—the strong being helpful to the weak, the weakest contributing his share, and each aiming to promote the edification and comfort of the whole body. When fellow-travellers to Zion meet together in the solemn assembly, and converse about Divine things, they should speak in a devotional spirit, and so as to excite and nourish devotional feelings in others.

The *matters* of Christian intercourse are the great truths of the Word, given by Christ, not only to make wise to salvation, but to be the distinctive mark of genuine discipleship, and the grand means of spiritual intercourse and communion. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."¹ "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."² "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellow-

¹ John viii. 31, 32.

² Colossians iii. 16.

ship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”¹ These beautiful passages teach us, that converse about the truths of the Word is to proceed not from mere speculative views, or transient impressions, but from the rich indwelling of the Word, and from continuing under its power, in practical subjection to it; and that the truths of the Scripture are to be employed for mutual instruction, exhortation, and comfort. Thus the Word spoken in love becomes the great means of fellowship with saints; and this again is the nearest step to the enjoyment of the highest privilege of which any are capable—communion with the persons of the most glorious Godhead. Would we realize this exalted fellowship? The truths about which we converse must previously be matters of believing experience, and must enter largely into our spiritual life. We must be able to say, “*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.*” Personal acquaintance with the power of the truth will give weight to the words uttered. “The speech seasoned with salt” will “minister grace to the hearers;” and, like the intercourse between the apostles and primitive Christians, when they met after receiving injurious treatment from persecuting Jewish rulers, converse on the Word known, loved, and experienced will lead to united prevailing prayer, and to joyful praise and thanksgiving.

While all the truths of Divine revelation may form appropriate topics of spiritual converse, there are subjects which, both as being doctrinal and eminently practical and consolatory, will ever furnish matter of unfailing interest and delightful intercourse to God’s believing people. These, too, when opened up and enlarged upon, in the freedom of fraternal converse, and in the outflowings of sanctified affection, will supply matter of fervent pleading at the mercy-seat.

1. The wondrous PLAN OF HUMAN REDEMPTION will always form a theme of profitable spiritual converse and believing prayer to God’s people. Angels contemplate with amazement and delight the costly scheme, and ever “*desire to look into these things.*”² Saints that have gone to glory view with admiration the work of redemption, and make it the theme of their loftiest praise. The plan of man’s salvation brings into view the persons of the glorious Godhead, their counsels of sovereign wisdom and love from eternity. Believers are instructed to address God as “OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN,” in joint supplications. His paternal character and sovereign love

¹ 1 John i. 3.

² 1 Peter i. 12.

in the gift of his well-beloved Son, will furnish a subject of adoring wonder and absorbing interest for ever. The love and condescension of the Second Person of the Trinity, in becoming Surety and Mediator, will excite fervent gratitude and praise; while the covenant between the Father and the Son concerning man's salvation must always elicit earnest regard, and inspire the children of God with joyful confidence. Hence originate all the blessings of redemption, and from this as an unfathomable, unfailing fountain, flow all rich streams of blessing. Believers take hold of this covenant for themselves, and even amid manifold troubles declare it to be "all their salvation, and all their desire;" and in their intercourse one with the other, the "counsel of peace," the "New Testament," ratified by the blood of the Testator, cannot fail to supply topics of delightful converse and of fervent social prayer. The Saviour himself, as He entered on his last sufferings, had his Spirit refreshed and elevated in contemplating the eternal purpose of mercy. "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."¹ The Divine love in the covenant has ever been to the saints a subject of fervent prayer and adoring praise. Earnestly have they prayed, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation." Joyfully have they exclaimed in praise, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever;"² and with the redeemed in heaven, believers on earth unite in the emphatic ascription, "SALVATION TO OUR GOD WHICH SITTETH UPON THE THRONE AND TO THE LAMB." The converse of fellow-saints on the economical relations of the persons of the Godhead, on the love which originated human redemption, and on the covenant of grace, is eminently fitted to enlarge their views, minister to their spiritual support and consolation, lead them to assured confidence, and excite them to prayer and to abounding praise and thanksgiving.

2. *The person, character, and work of the Redeemer* furnish diversified subjects of spiritual converse. He is Immanuel, God with us, Jehovah our righteousness, the mighty God, blessed

¹ John xvii. 5, 6, 26.

² Psalm cvi. 4; Rev. i. 5, 6.

for ever. His work of vicarious obedience, and his atoning sacrifice, derive all their efficacy from his Godhead ; and the firmest ground of confidence is supplied from the perfection of his atonement, and the supreme excellence of his character. The ransom which He paid is infinite, and it is therefore adequate to cancel all the sinner's debt. The blood shed is incalculably precious, and it can cleanse from all sin. The Saviour is almighty, and He is therefore "able to save to the uttermost all that will come unto God by Him."¹ The Saviour executes all needful offices, and stands to his people in all endearing relations. He is Prophet, Priest, and King in the covenant. He is his people's Husband, Shepherd, Elder Brother, Physician, and Friend. He is their light and saving health, their shield and hiding-place, their treasure, and all. These relations He occupies, and this character He sustains unchangeably. Jesus is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."² The work which He carries on in heaven, as a great High Priest and glorious King, is the complement of his atonement on earth. He was delivered for our offences, and He rose again for our justification. The living Redeemer applies what the dying Saviour purchased. It is our cause which He advocates in heaven. Into his hands is committed all power in heaven and earth ; and He conducts the government of all worlds, that He may gather his elect from all nations, and bring many sons to glory. Believers delight to embrace Christ as a personal Saviour, as their only Beloved and Friend, and to have intercourse with Him ; and in their fellowship with one another, they cannot refrain from declaring his gracious dealings towards them, and from showing forth his praise.

3. *The character and work of the Holy Spirit* will form another fertile theme of Christian intercourse. The Holy Spirit is the grand promise of the new economy—the great Agent in the application of the blessings of redemption. The Saviour died to open the way for the mission of the Spirit. He went up to glory to send Him, that He might compensate for the want of his personal presence with his people, and might put them in possession of all the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth ; it is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." "He shall glorify me : for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."³ In every view of his

¹ Hebrews vii. 25.² Hebrews xiii. 8.³ John xvi. 7, 14.

character and work, the blessed Spirit is an object of unspeakable interest to the believer; and the consideration of his person, office, and operations supplies to him subjects of devout contemplation, and of profitable and delightful converse. The Divine personality of the Spirit, his love and concern in the covenant of grace, as a consenting and approving party, and the distinct part which He acts in the application of redemption, are doctrines vital and all important. The work of the Spirit on the human nature of the Saviour, in the eminent endowments of the apostles, in the inspiration of Holy Scripture, and in the setting up of the Christian dispensation, are subjects of contemplation at once wonderful and most engaging. And his perpetual office and continual sanctifying work in the Church can never fail to engage the attention, and excite the admiration and praise of all who love God's salvation.

Redemption must be particularly and individually applied, if it is to be of any avail to us; and this is the exclusive promise of the Holy Spirit, the Divine sanctifier and comforter. Spiritual blessings are communicated solely through his gracious presence and powerful operation. Here all is matter of amazing condescension, and of humble and profound gratitude and joyful praise. The Spirit quickens the soul dead in sin. He enlightens the mind and renews the heart. He unites to Christ, the living Head. He himself comes to dwell in the heart as a present Deity, making the person a living temple, and sealing to the day of redemption. He reveals Christ and the covenant to the soul, applies the promise, intimates pardon to the conscience, gives enlarged liberty in God's ways, warms the heart in love, and leads into endeared fellowship with God. He is the efficient Agent in promoting holiness, the *witness* of sonship, and the *earnest* of heaven. All spiritual blessings in Christ, the living Head, are communicated by the Spirit to the members on earth. He is within them as "the Spirit of grace and supplication," helping their infirmities, and giving them access with boldness to the heavenly throne. The Spirit is the blessed author of revival to the people of God, the unction whereby they understand all things. He imparts to them abounding peace—He comforts and elevates their hearts—confers a meetness for glory and an assured hope, and at length conducts them to the land of uprightness. In the view of such precious spiritual blessings as revealed in the Word, and having some experience of these gracious operations, believers honour the

Spirit, and cannot but seek his presence and saving work for themselves as their highest privilege. Solemnly warned that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," they are encouraged, at the same time, by the assurance that the "Holy Spirit will be given to them that ask Him." This cannot but form one of the believer's chief and most frequent desires. They will seek the Spirit to lead them into all truth, and as the Comforter promised, to abide with them for ever. "*Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.*" "*Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.*" "*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices may flow out.*"¹

To fellow-believers and to others, the saints cannot but speak of the love and joy of the Spirit, and make mention at times of his saving operations. All past blessings have been enjoyed by the Church through his person and powerful influence. He has awakened and converted sinners. In holy ordinances He has been the living water. Ministers have been sanctified and blessed by the anointing of the Spirit. The Word has been "in demonstration of the Spirit and in power." Plentiful rain from heaven has watered the heritage of the Lord. Many sons have been born in Zion, and believers, walking in the Spirit, have attained to "joy and peace in believing," and have abounded in the fruits of holiness. The Spirit is a spirit of liberty, and of concord in all the churches. The promise and hope of future blessing for the Church are inseparably connected with the plentiful effusion of the Spirit: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, my blessing upon thine offspring." "Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field."² Those who have tasted this heavenly gift, and who know how necessary to themselves is the gracious presence of the Divine Comforter, cannot but speak of Him to fellow-believers. Converse on such a theme is fitted to minister inexhaustible matter of edification and comfort. Here, too, is a subject of united prayer, the most suitable and comprehensive—a theme, too, of animating hope and joyful expectation. As saints converse of the Spirit and of his wonderful works, they "walk in the Spirit" and honour Him. Their hearts are prepared for the reception of this heavenly Guest; and He is wont, not unfrequently, to come in and impart to them light and strong

¹ Psalm cxliii. 10; li. 11; Song iv. 16. ² Isaiah xlv. 3; xxxii. 15.

consolation. The future glory and blessedness of the Church, as connected with the promise of the Spirit, presented to the eye of faith, are fitted to unite believers in the most endeared fellowship, to support them under all present trials, and to animate and strengthen them in the Christian work and warfare.

4. *The Church of Christ—its ordinances, privileges, and prospects*—must ever form a subject of affecting interest to believers, a fertile topic of spiritual converse, and copious matter of earnest prayer. The Church, comprising all the redeemed and sanctified—the excellent of the earth—is an object of the most endeared interest to Christ, as it is the grand means of manifesting the Divine glory in the earth. The Church is the body, of which Christ is the exalted Head; the costly building, of which He is the Architect, Foundation, and Chief Corner Stone; the kingdom, of which He is the sole gracious King; the elect spouse, of which He is the heavenly Bridegroom and living Head. It is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” In this society believers have the deepest interest. “*Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all.*” Therein the saints were born to newness of life—thence they derive all their spiritual nourishment, and obtain bright and blissful hopes. Here they behold “the beauty of the Lord,” as they reverently inquire in his temple. They see “the goings of the King in his sanctuary;” and as He is “held in the galleries,” they obtain from Him richest blessings. Need it be wondered at that the saints should fervently desire the privileges of the Church, and that they should continually seek her prosperity? Delight in holy ordinances is characteristic of all true believers. Desire after the privileges of God’s house, and rest in them, have originated many of their most fervid expressions: “Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.” “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.” “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.” “All my springs are in thee.” “This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.”¹

¹ Psalm xxvi. 8; lxxxiv. 1, 2; xlii. 1; cxxxvii. 1, 5, 6; lxxxviii. 7; cxxxii. 14.

Not for themselves alone do the saints ardently love and delight in Zion. From the Church on earth, a boundless revenue of honour redounds to all the persons of the Godhead. Here the glory of the blessed Trinity is made great. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."¹ Unnumbered millions, too, of the human family, receive light and peace, manifold blessings and blessedness in time and throughout eternity, through the ministry, ordinances, and fellowship of the Church. All the revolutions of nations—all events, all movements throughout the universe—are rendered subservient to her best interests. Angels of light—principalities and powers in heavenly places—see, with wonder, in the Church, "the manifold wisdom of God."² Ascending Mount Zion, we "come to an innumerable company of angels;" and these exalted beings account it their high honour to encamp around the Church. They evince the deepest interest in all her concerns, and they minister continually to them that shall be "heirs of salvation." Fellow-members of this distinguished society—fellow-citizens of Jerusalem which is above, believers, when they meet together, maintain a frequent interchange of thoughts, desires, and prayers, about Zion. Here have their hearts found a centre and a resting-place of mutual interest and warmest affection. They cannot but be mutually and deeply affected by the Church's trials and conflicts. They cannot but rejoice in her welfare, as "they suck and are satisfied with the breasts of her consolations."³

Whatever promotes her benefit is to them a common concern, engaging their devoted and sustained activities. The state of the Church in every land excites their heartfelt and prayerful interest. They cannot but be troubled in spirit when any part of the Church is low and oppressed, as the tidings of enlargement and revival minister the liveliest joys to their hearts. The prospects of her future glory frequently raise believers, united in holy fellowship, above present discouragements, animate them to devoted effort, and encourage them to submit cheerfully to embittered sufferings. With these prospects full in view, apostles, reformers, and missionaries have devoted their lives to the advancement of truth; and many a heroic martyr, gladdened by them, triumphed at the stake or on the scaffold, and encouraged fellow-confessors to resolute endurance. Huss, Latimer, Tyndal, and many covenanted worthies thus, with the eye steadily fixed on the future triumph of the truth, and on the future glory of the Church, cheerfully surrendered life in

¹ Psalm l. 2.² Ephesians iii. 10.³ Isaiah lxvi. 11.

the cause of Christ ; and their bright example has encouraged others to embrace the truth as it is in Jesus. The standard, as it fell from the hands of men who loved not their lives to the death, was grasped by others, to be transmitted from one generation to another, until all the ends of the earth shall see God's salvation. Actuated by the same spirit, and rejoicing in the same delightful prospects, we should cherish the pious resolution of those who of old were united in holy fellowship : " For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." " I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." " For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be with thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."¹

5. *The kingdom and providences of the Redeemer form to the saints delightful subjects of spiritual converse.* The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of saints, rules supreme throughout the universe. He is not only the Creator of all things in heaven and earth, but " by Him all things consist."² To Him has been given " power over all flesh," that He may " give eternal life to as many as God has given Him."³ A " name above every name" has been conferred upon Him, that " at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth." He is " Head over all things to his Church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."⁴ To the saints of God, the consideration of the kingdom of providence being under the dominion of the Mediator is matter of deepest interest, and is replete with the strongest consolation. It is, indeed, a theme of the loftiest and most delightful contemplation. All things are in the hands of their Saviour and Elder Brother, for the advancement of the Divine glory, and the everlasting good of his people. Intricate and wonderful as are the movements of Providence, they are all under the control of the " GOVERNOR AMONG THE NATIONS." Above the throne is the " likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it."⁵ The whole dispensation is conducted according to the arrangements of the everlasting covenant, " As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appear-

¹ Isaiah lxii. 2 ; Psalm cxxii. 1, 8, 9.

² Colossians i. 17.

³ John xvii. 2.

⁴ Phil. ii. 9-11 ; Ephes. i. 22, 23.

⁵ Ezekiel i. 26.

ance of the brightness round about.”¹ The “seven-sealed book,” containing the purposes of sovereign wisdom and love towards the Church, and to each individual believer, is in the hands of the Lamb slain, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He alone “prevails” to open it, as He sheds the light of his glory on every dark page, and renders all things conducive to the best interests of his people. How satisfactory and cheering to them is such a discovery! All beings, elements, and events are under the immediate control of their own Lord and Redeemer. He manages all the concerns—the most important and the most minute—of his saints, in infinite wisdom and love. Their footsteps He orders aright. He carves out their lot, appoints them their various services, and administers all needed help and strength for their performance. Over their trials, He presides, and renders them as the refiner’s fire and fuller’s soap—the means of their sanctification, and of their preparation for honour and glory. Their enemies He restrains and brings down, and upon the waters of trouble through which they are called to pass, He comes walking in majesty and condescension, proclaiming when they are in fear or danger, “*Be still and know that I am God.*” “It is I, be not afraid.”² The believer is thus furnished with matter of firm confidence and joyful hope in every possible case. “His Father is at the helm.” His interests could not possibly be in better hands. Whatever may betide, he is safe, and all needful provision for soul and body is sure. His “place of defence is the munition of rocks, where his bread shall be given, and his water made sure.”³ The issues to him are unspeakably joyful. He will, without fail, reach the desired haven. His “eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.”⁴

While believers note the movements of Providence towards themselves and fellow-saints as special and gracious, and observe providential dealings with others around them, they fix their regards, too, upon the *kingdom of Christ*, in its present state and future prospects. The varied aspects of human affairs—the changes occurring throughout the nations of the earth, providential blessings and judgments—are viewed in relation to the Mediator’s kingdom. The universal dominion of the Mediator is the grand central principle that explains the whole, and displays the harmony and consistence of the wondrous scheme. “The Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad.”

¹ Ezekiel i. 28.

² Psalm xlv. 10; Matthew xiv. 27.

³ Isaiah xxxiii. 16.

⁴ Ver. 17.

The "signs of the times" are thus observed by the believer with vivid attention and absorbing interest ; and his sympathies are ever with the cause of true religion and scriptural morality, and with the kingdom of Christ, whether prosperous or adverse. While the enthroned Mediator presides over all, and conducts every event and change to a blessed issue, the Church of the redeemed is the centre of all providential movements, and the prayers of the faithful have an important influence on every part of the dispensation. Elijah, a man of like passions with us, shut and opened heaven by his prayers. Thus, too, "the two anointed ones" have power to "shut heaven as often as they will, and to smite the earth with all plagues."¹ When the interceding Angel stands at the golden altar in heaven, and offers up much incense, with the prayers of all saints, He takes "the fire of the altar and casts it into the earth"—thus sending forth judgments through the kingdom of antichrist."² This shows strikingly that the Mediator has respect to the prayers of his people in all providential dispensations ; and in answer to them, not unfrequently, He performs his strange work of judgment in the earth. For themselves, the saints have high delight and sweet enjoyment in marking the ways of Divine Providence towards themselves and others. "*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*"³ It has been justly remarked, that providential movements are the "fulfilment of Scripture." God's people are frequently constrained to bear testimony that the providences of the Redeemer to them, whether prosperous or afflictive, are special and gracious ; and, at the same time, that not one word that He has spoken has failed of accomplishment. On such a theme, they can never fail to expatiate with lively interest and satisfaction in their intercourse with one another. Hence they can gather matter of holy comfort and joy. Here, too, are presented the strongest motives for support, vigorous exertion, and animating hope.

In connection with the providence of the Mediator, the saints can mark gracious answers of prayers, and they are encouraged to persevere in prayer and supplication for all saints. Consoled and elevated by holy converse on the providence and grace of the Redeemer, they pray unitedly and earnestly, "Thy kingdom come." "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He will appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the

¹ James v. ; Rev. xi. 6.

² Rev. viii. 1.

³ Psalm cvii. 43.

destitute, and not despise their prayer."¹ Associations for united prayer and Christian converse furnish favourable occasions for mutually devising and prosecuting plans for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the earth. Fellowship meetings are admirably fitted for promoting the great work of the world's conversion. The most happy results have already flowed from the "missionary concerts" of united prayer. The salutary fruits would be still greater, if such re-unions of prayer were extended—if the whole Church were divided into small select societies of Christians living as brethren, and assembling together for the express object of giving the Lord no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

6. The *spiritual experience of God's people* communicated to one another will form a fertile and profitable theme of converse, of mutual encouragement, exhortation, and prayer.

While it is freely admitted that Christians should never make their varying frames and feelings either a ground of confidence or of undue discouragement; and while we hold likewise that there may be danger in directing Christian intercourse exclusively or chiefly to internal emotions and states, and that the great truths of *objective* Christianity should form the principal matters of Christian fellowship; we hold, at the same time, that Christians in spiritual converse may, and ought at times to give expression to the inmost thoughts of their hearts. They may tell of their fears and conflicts and joys, and may support and encourage one another by recounting the work of the Saviour's grace in their souls. This is unquestionably implied in the idea of Christian intercourse, which in its very nature must be fraternal, and sympathetic, and confidential. Thus believers open their hearts to one another, and become the more endeared to each other, not only as fellow-travellers and partakers of the common salvation, but also as having the same griefs and sorrows, the same conflicts, supports, and consolations. This is implied, too, in their being called to render mutual assistance in the spiritual warfare—the strong supporting the weak, bearing each other's burdens, weeping with them that weep, and being joint helpers of each other's joy. Christians, when speaking often one to another, are not only to converse in "psalms and hymns," celebrating the Divine character and works, but also in "spiritual songs," making mention of their internal states, and of the work of the Spirit on their hearts.² In this spirit, the psalmist invites the fearers

¹ Psalm cii. 16, 17.

² Colossians iii. 17.

of God to "come and hear;" and he will "tell what God has done for his soul." In many of the inspired songs of Zion, which are employed in social worship, believers declare to God, and to one another, the spiritual experience of saints. The apostles, too, in writing by the Spirit to the churches, not unfrequently relate their own experience, in deliverances wrought, spiritual graces exercised, conflicts engaged in, and assurances enjoyed as motives of exhortation and encouragement to fellow-labourers in the spiritual warfare.

Freedom and cordiality of Christian intercourse appear therefore to demand that the people of God, when they meet together for social worship, should, with humility and godly fear, make mention of the Lord's dealings towards them—that they should tell of their supports and comforts, of their trials and difficulties, of their hopes and prospects, and that they should bear testimony to God's faithfulness and the excellence of true religion, in administering direction and help to others, and in seeking an interest in mutual prayer and praise. The disciples journeying to Emmaus, when the Saviour had revealed his glory, and dispelled their darkness, compared their hearts' experience together: "Did not our hearts burn within us?"¹ When the Redeemer dismissed the cured demoniac of Decapolis, He commanded him—"Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."² The "great things" that Christ has done for the soul, are especially to be told in the intercourse of fellow-Christians—that his kindness and truth may be enhanced, that those who are weak and doubting may be encouraged and strengthened, and that all may be led to walk worthy of Him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. This interchange of believing experience, when judiciously made, has been frequently a means of eminent blessing to God's people. Jonathan Edwards, in his *Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Northampton*, states that the recounting of the Lord's work in one place, or in particular instances, often proved a means of revival in others. Such has been the experience of the Church in many other cases. At the memorable periods in these countries, when, among our Presbyterian forefathers, practical godliness flourished, it was customary for the members of prayer-meetings, in their intercourse, to submit "*cases of conscience*"—to ask counsel of brethren in relation to important steps in the conduct of life,

¹ Luke xxiv. 32.

² Mark v. 19.

and to solicit and set a high value upon intercessory prayer. A return to this primitive practice would tend to enliven the social fellowship meeting, and to attract to it serious persons; while brethren, thus interchanging gracious experiences, would learn the more to esteem, love, and sympathize with each other, and to realize the delightful communion of saints, travelling together through the wilderness, destined to come at length to the same happy home, when the remembrance and recital of former experiences will enhance their joys, and swell their praises throughout eternity.

Lastly. The *exalted state in glory* to which believers are travelling, will furnish to saints gathered together in Christ's name a lofty and inspiring subject of mutual converse and prayer.

Christians are born from above. True to their heavenly vocation, "they seek a city which hath foundations," their affections are centred "on things above;" their "treasure is in heaven," and "their hearts" there also. Heaven is their predestined home, to which they are travelling through the world as a wilderness, and where "every one of them shall appear before the Lord at length." He in whose name they assemble for social worship is their "Father in heaven," and all the blessings that they seek for themselves and others, descend as the fertilizing rain from above. Their privilege even here is to come to "the heavenly Jerusalem," and to "sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus;" and their holy vocation, and all their duties and trials, point to the celestial country as their final blissful abode, as they are designed to prepare them for the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. How sweet and elevating the thought that heaven is to the redeemed their Father's house, which Jesus, their Elder Brother, has gone to prepare for them! How blissful the assurance that He will come again and receive them to Himself, that they may eternally be with Him, beholding his glory, heirs and joint heirs with Him of God! Believers thus called and privileged have their "conversation in heaven;" and as all the work of grace, and all Divine providential dispensations tend to make them meet for glory, and ultimately to introduce them to its enjoyment, it is most natural that the heavenly state should not only largely engage their most solemn thoughts, and most ardent affections, but likewise that it should engross much of their converse, and of their united prayers and praises, and of their spiritual intercourse with one another. They are fellow-soldiers, fight-

ing together the same fight of faith, and the palm of complete victory in heaven will be their common and glorious reward. They travel in company through the wilderness, and pass through Baca's vale, as they go on from strength to strength till every one appears before the Lord in Zion. Privileged to carry all their concerns to the throne, and to expect all blessing from it, they feel it betimes, in their intercourse, to be profitable and delightful indeed to be engaged in the exercises of conversing, praising, and praying together about the "city of habitation," the heavenly inheritance. In such exercises, the trials of the wilderness are forgotten, their title to the bliss to be revealed is rendered clear, their meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light is advanced, their views of the celestial city are expanded, their affections sublimated, and their energies are called forth to press forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. What encouragement to perseverance in conflict and endurance in trial are furnished by the declaration, "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with Him?"¹ As rest succeeds labour, so in glory "there remains a rest for the people of God." The loved Lord of saints, whose they are and whom they serve, Himself says, "Him that overcometh will I give to sit with me on my throne, even as I am overcome and am set down with my Father upon his throne."²

The *two* grand privileges which believers intensely desire—the attainment of holiness, and the gracious presence of Christ—are partly realized in the social prayer-meeting on earth; but their full enjoyment is reserved for heaven. There saints shall be perfect in holiness, as well as in knowledge and felicity, and they shall be ever with the Lord. There, too, the fellowship of the saints shall be perfect, glorious, and eternal. Sin and death enter not "the many-mansioned house" in glory, and there are no alienations, strifes, or separations any more forever. There is "no night there;" but the throne of God and of the Lamb is in it. God shall dwell among them, and his servants "shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads."³ With such wondrous prospects before them it is every way to be expected that fellow-believers, in their spiritual converse, should give expression to the joyful hope of heaven, and should encourage and animate one another to press forward to the glorious inheritance. All vain speculations about the locality of paradise, or the circumstances of glorified

¹ 2 Peter ii. 12.

² Revelation iii. 21.

³ Revelation xxii. 4.

spirits, are unsuitable to such converse. But, like the pilgrims on the "delectable mountains," in hallowed fellowship meetings, believers obtain, at times, enlivening views of the celestial city; and as they love the scene of holy intercourse, they gird up their loins and run the faster. Waiting on the Lord, "they renew their strength, mount up with wings as eagles, run and are not weary, walk and are not faint."¹ In the words of a venerable servant of God, speaking of such intercourse: "Believers grow in the knowledge of heaven by the study of holiness, by the experience of communion with God, and in the enjoyment of the sweet fellowship of saints. By their heavenward faces, they encourage one another; by their prayers, they obtain that holy help by which they are kept from fainting, and strengthened in their way; and by their songs, as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they speed their way, and have foretastes of fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore, when their prayers shall be ended, and praise shall be their everlasting employment and delight."²

¹ Isaiah xi. 31.

² *Private Social Prayer*, by Andrew Symington, D.D., p. 15.

CHAPTER V.

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL CONVERSE AND UNITED PRAYER.

WHILE the grand reason for observing any commanded duty is the authority of Him who has enjoined it, it has been justly observed that, in the way of obedience, benefits are enjoined which are in vain sought elsewhere. Ancient moralists have propounded the maxim—“*Virtue is its own reward.*” The clearer utterance of the Sacred Oracles is, “*Wisdom’s ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;*” “*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*”¹

The ordinance of private Christian fellowship has *advantages* common to it with other religious ordinances, and it has some which are peculiar to itself. All institutions of our holy religion, appointed by its Divine Author, tend mutually to recommend and strengthen one another. They were ordained not only for the purpose of manifesting the Divine glory, but also to promote the best interests of the human being, and to advance his fellowship with God, the Author of his existence. None of these ordinances is perfect without the others—none of them can be neglected or disregarded without incurring the risk of doing injury to others, or of marring the benefit to be derived from them. As Christians are under the highest obligations to honour and submit to their Lord and Master in all things, so, as they have opportunity, should they wait upon all his institutions, that they may fully realize the benefits which they are separately and in combination fitted to confer; that vital religion may thus prosper among themselves and others; and that the Church, edified in holiness and comfort, may be advanced to her perfect state in glory.

The intercourse of Christians in stated assemblies for spiritual converse and united prayer, is more free and intimate than in some other associations; and being among a select number of Christians, continued at brief intervals, it possesses a character of variety and regularity which does not belong to other

¹ Prov. iii. 17; 1 Timothy iv. 8.

religious institutions. The family government is in its nature *hierarchical*, and the household consisting generally of the same individuals, even where love and wisdom reign, there is less variety, and in many instances less opportunity of inquiry and improvement than in the social prayer-meeting, where no individual claims or exercises superiority. In the public ordinances of the sanctuary, though Christians assemble together as brethren, to hear what God speaks, they are mixed with other unconverted, and who may even have made no open profession of religion. One is commissioned to instruct the assembly and the duty of the congregation is to hear and receive the words of wisdom; and though the assembled worshippers offer up united prayers and praises, they do not enjoy that familiarity of intercourse which belongs to select associations of fellow travellers to Zion. Even when met together in the banqueting house, to enjoy the communion of the death of Christ, believers rather enjoy secret fellowship of spirit than the communion in which they are called to "speak often one to another," to converse, and pray, and sing spiritual songs together. A select society of devout worshippers, meeting regularly, brings with it something different from, and in some respect *above*, any of these. The freedom and openness of intercourse which characterize it, afford to its members the fullest opportunity of heart communing with heart; and privileges shared in common are enhanced and increased. When two real Christians walk together agreed, possessed of the same precious faith, and animated by the same lively hope, their intercourse is most sweet and profitable. Yet the stated fellowship meeting, in some respects, surpasses this. Greater fulness and variety of Christian experience is contributed for mutual edification, support, and comfort; the heart is enlarged, as the circle of Christian friendship is expanded, and there is a larger room provided for the operation of Christian sympathy and affection, and a wider range afforded for the exercise of all the social and benevolent feelings. Among the advantages of social prayer meetings may be mentioned—

First. *The diversified spiritual gifts of the members of the Church are combined for mutual profit.* The manifold wisdom of the Holy Spirit is displayed in the different gifts which He has imparted to the servants of God, distributing to every man according to his several ability. "Unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ." ¹ Every

¹ Ephesians iv. 7.

a small and select association of Christians, variety of gift observable. One is endowed with superior intellect, another distinguished for fervid affections; one has a retentive memory, another a ready utterance; and one is characterized by fluency and fulness in the gift of prayer. While some are suited to instruct, or to warn, exhort, and reprove; others are peculiarly qualified to strengthen the weak and impart consolation to mourners. This variety of spiritual gifts is not conferred for individual use, but for the benefit of the community. Like the members of the natural body, each member of the spiritual society is designed to serve another; and his several gifts are bestowed on the believer mainly for this purpose.

The social prayer-meeting is an institution eminently fitted to render available for the common good all the separate and distinguished gifts of Christ's servants. With brethren dwelling in unity, and assembling together where Christ, their exalted King, has promised to be, no member is useless, no gift which the Spirit has imparted is superfluous. What is lacking in one is supplied by the abundance of others; and what to the individual may appear of little benefit, may become subservient to general edification. The very existence of diversity of spiritual gifts would seem to demand an appropriate sphere for their exercise; and this is admirably supplied by the association for spiritual converse and united prayer. Here no talent is allowed to go to waste, or to be laid up in a napkin. Christians gathered together are bound to exhort, edify, support, and comfort one another. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."¹ The judicious remark of Dr Owen, in his *Treatise on Spiritual Gifts*, is that when gifts are employed for the ends for which they were conferred, they are increased; whereas, if their proper use be neglected, they are taken away. How important, then, is the institution, which is specially fitted to call forth into exercise spiritual gifts, and at the same time to improve their possessors and to benefit others! All past experience attests that Christians, delighting in select associations for prayer and spiritual converse, have themselves thereby grown in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; while the Church, in the diligent observance of such an institution, has been edified and comforted.

Secondly. *The preservation, increase, and diffusion of religio*

knowledge are peculiarly promoted by private Christian fellowship. Of the last blissful days of the Gospel dispensation, it is declared, that "they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest."¹ This cheering announcement implies, that up till that joyful consummation Christians are employed in diffusing the knowledge of God, and that they are engaged each in instructing his neighbour in Divine things. This is the unquestionable duty of all who have received the knowledge of the truth ; but a duty which, at the same time, is sadly overlooked and neglected. Social private fellowship furnishes an appropriate means for its performance ; and recourse must be had to such an institution, if religious knowledge would either be preserved, increased, or more widely diffused. Even among those who have been instructed in Divine things, religious knowledge will diminish, if the mind is not frequently exercised in contemplation on spiritual subjects, and if no or few opportunities are enjoyed of applying to practical purposes the knowledge acquired. Stated meetings of Christians for spiritual converse and united prayer prevent this declension, and serve to increase the desire after religious knowledge, and to further its acquisition. The faculties of the mind are called into exercise in connection with the most important of all subjects. Divine truths are investigated and more clearly seen ; things already known are called to remembrance, and the desire is excited after higher attainments.

The social prayer-meeting embraces in its membership persons of different standing in the school of Christ—some fathers, some young men, and some babes in Christ. How lovely is it to behold these, according to their several capacities, and in their several places, mutual instructors of each other ! The aged believer imparting to the young and inexperienced matured views of the truths of revelation, and of God's good ways ; and the young sitting at the feet of fathers to be taught the pleasant ways of wisdom, and themselves at times imparting a stimulus to advanced Christians, by their warm affections and ardent zeal in the cause of religion ! Thus knowledge of the most valuable kind is increased and diffused. It is well known that, for practical purposes, conversation is the most effective method of dispelling obscurity, rectifying mistakes, and leading to sound and enlarged views. When such conversation is with those who have applied the truths about which they speak to

¹ Hebrews viii. 11.

the conduct of life, and have had experience of their power to direct, and comfort, and bless ; and when it is carried on in connection with solemn approaches to the throne of grace, by persons sitting at the feet of the Great Teacher, it must be of no ordinary value. "*The lips of the wise disperse knowledge,*" and "*the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.*" Select passages of the Word read and heard, the songs of Zion sung in strains inspired by the Spirit, meditation on spiritual truths, and Christian conversation, cannot but be highly conducive to instruction ; and by such means the light of religious knowledge continues to shine brightly in the Church, and to advance, notwithstanding the world's darkness.

In the social prayer-meeting there are peculiar facilities for cultivating and extending religious knowledge. Such associations assemble regularly and frequently, the members are on the most intimate terms with one another, as the exercises in which they engage call them to the attentive and diligent study of the truths of the Word. There is full scope allowed for the most familiar intercourse. Particular inquiries are encouraged ; and brethren feel themselves bound to endeavour to solve them, and thus to instruct and edify one another. Thus doubts are obviated, difficulties removed, and mistakes corrected. The young and inexperienced are nourished up in "the words of faith and good doctrine ;" and even aged and venerable disciples make progress in the knowledge of Divine things, and are enabled to rejoice while cultivating Christian fellowship, that their views are enlarged, their consolations are made to abound, and their prospects of the attainment of perfect knowledge and happiness become brighter.

It is worthy of remark, too, as confirming this view of the advantage of private Christian fellowship, that in all scriptural efforts for diffusing the knowledge of Divine truth, either at home or abroad, recourse is had either directly to this ordinance, or to something that nearly resembles it. Those who send missionaries abroad, to Jew or Gentile, resort to social prayer and spiritual converse in making the appointment and designation ; while the labourers in dark places of the earth confess the value of the "*concert*" for united prayer, and, besides, hail opportunities of meeting with fellow-labourers, or with converts for the same hallowed exercises. When, moreover, the thick darkness which broods over the neglected masses of the population of our larger towns is attempted to be dispelled, the humble labourer finds it important not only to

each from house to house, but also to collect into little assemblies for prayer and familiar converse those who are willing to receive his instructions. By these means the weak glimmerings of light spread and increase, souls are rescued from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and even amid the hopeless outcasts of society not a few are brought to rejoice in the light of salvation.¹

Thirdly. *MUTUAL FAITHFUL EXHORTATION*, and the consequent *spiritual protection and welfare* of Christians, is another important result of private Christian fellowship. Christians in the present world are exposed to manifold trials and temptations. They are but imperfectly sanctified, and so have yielding principles within, ever ready to comply with the suggestions of the tempter. The heart is "deceitful above all things." Hence Christians need at all times holy vigilance; and they are reminded that their constant duty is to "watch and pray that they enter not into temptation." Frequent and familiar intercourse with fellow-saints is of eminent advantage in guard-

¹ One of the most striking and cheering examples of the happy effects of the aggressive influence of Christianity is furnished by the institution of Town Missions, established for reclaiming the neglected masses of the population of cities and large towns. This truly valuable society first commenced its operations in these countries in Glasgow, in the year 1825 and owes its existence to the self-denying labours of the late lamented David Nasmith. About the same time, without any concert with Mr Nasmith, the author of this work, who had for a considerable period previously earnestly desired to set on foot some agency for meeting the spiritual wants of larger towns, was instrumental in originating the Belfast Town Mission. It is gratifying to notice the existence of similar institutions not only in many of the large towns of these kingdoms, but likewise in America, and in various parts of the continent of Europe. The London City Mission, with its 250 agents, and an annual income of £30,000, conducted on a truly Christian and catholic basis, and receiving from some of the highest civil functionaries of the land attestations of its extensive usefulness, is a noble instance of the valuable fruits that result from attempts to honour God and benefit souls, that are made from small beginnings. The number of agents now is between *three and four hundred*, and the annual income more than £100,000. We have no doubt that Town Missions properly conducted, revealing the wants of the neglected masses of the population, and, at the same time, exhibiting the success of Christian efforts for their moral and spiritual improvement, will yet lead to extensive and vigorous attempts for the amelioration of the millions in Christian land who are living without God, and sunk in moral and physical wretchedness. In all such exertions, the prayer-meeting is found to be indispensable both to originate and carry forward successfully the benevolent undertaking such as would desire full information on the working of Town Missions will derive many valuable hints by perusing Vanderkiste's *Six Years' Labour among the Dens of London*, *The Missionary of Kilmainy*, and the reports of the *London City Mission*.

ing against temptation, or in delivering from its power. It has been justly remarked, that the first onset of the tempter was made upon the woman when *alone*, and that our Lord himself was taken to a scene of solitude to be tempted of the devil. In spiritual conflicts, it has been often found that it was not good for a Christian to be alone. Here "two are better than one. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow : but woe to him that is alone when he falleth ; for he hath not another to help him up."¹ In temptations that expose to outward evils, the companionship and faithful admonition of Christian brethren is often invaluable. The mind is thus impressed with salutary fear of sin ; the sense of Christian obligation is increased, and the very thought of acting unworthy of the fellowship of the faithful, or of bringing reproach upon the Christian name, serves to fortify against the assaults of the destroyer, and to turn away the heart from scenes and occasions of temptation. And in certain internal and powerful temptations, as the risings of unbelief, the workings of carnal or sensual imaginations, and the gloomy forebodings of despair, private Christian fellowship is a means frequently blessed of the Lord to relieve the distressed, and to impart light and peace to them that sit disconsolate in darkness and in the shadow of death. As when David played before the king of Israel, the "evil spirit from the Lord" was dispossessed, and the mind of the monarch restored to tranquillity ; so the words of affectionate Christian converse, and the voice of united prayer and praise, have often dispelled thick clouds, and restored to the wounded in spirit "the joys of God's salvation." In view of such temptations, and of mutual exhortation being an eminent means of deliverance, we are directed by the Spirit : "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day ; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*"²

The faithful counsels and earnest prayers of brethren, assembled in the prayer-meeting, have been a safeguard to not a few of the young ; and have been a preventive to many others, keeping them from the path of the destroyer. It is true that it is the Watchman of Israel, who never slumbers or sleeps, who can alone effectually keep the feet of his people ; but fellow-Christians are under Him an instrumentality which He extensively owns and honours. Every believer is designed to be his "brother's keeper," and the association of brethren

¹ Ecclesiastes iv. 9, 10.

² Hebrews iii. 12, 13.

dwelling in unity, renewing their strength by spiritual converse, and waiting at the throne of grace, is a defence which frequently proves too strong for temptations from without or from within to break down or remove. When persons yield to temptation, it has been observed that they forsake the assembling of themselves together. In the communion of the faithful they were safe. So soon as this is slighted or forsaken, their defence is departed, and they are ready to fall into the hands of the destroyer, and to be overcome of evil.

In cases in which brethren have been surprised and have fallen under temptation, private Christian fellowship has often been a happy means of recovering those that have fallen, and of joyful restoration. Christians have learned to be deeply concerned about erring brethren, and fervent prayers, individual and united, have been offered for their recovery. Considering themselves as likewise exposed to temptation, and that they stand only by faith, they have learned to restore such in the spirit of meekness. The display of fraternal concern and affection often melts the heart of the wanderer. The penitent is disburdened of his distress in confessing his fault to sorrowing and sympathizing brethren; and the charity, that with its mantle of love covers a multitude of sins, exults in a restored soul saved from death—in a prodigal restored again to his Father's house.

Though Christians, it must be confessed, frequently fail in displaying a forgiving spirit, and a yearning solicitude for the safety or recovery of brethren exposed to temptation, yet the duties to which we have referred are in themselves all-important; and when properly performed, are of singular use in the fellowship of the Church. Brotherly counsel and meek and faithful reproof have preserved many from falling; and the warm Christian love that dictates them has provided a refuge for the wanderer, and has administered to the heart-broken penitent strong consolation. Associations for united prayer and spiritual converse supply a valuable means for the exercise of these gracious principles and feelings, and the due performance of these duties; and they are therefore calculated to subserve eminently useful purposes to the Church in all ages. Not unfrequently has it been observed, that those who love the prayer-meeting have been kept, when, in an hour of temptation error and apostasy prevail; while, on the other hand, those who comply with "the spirit of the times," and "fall away from their steadfastness," give plain evidence of their defection, by

discontinuing their attendance upon the assembly for Christian fellowship.¹ Christians should therefore learn not to "forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is; but should exhort one another; and so much the more as they see the day approaching." The promise is large and all-encouraging, "Because thou hast kept the Word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."²

Fourthly. *The spirit of true piety and devotion is nourished and strengthened by the exercises of private Christian fellowship.* Vigorous piety is of great importance to the profession and prosperity of the Church, and to the best interests of her individual members. It is possible to have an orthodox creed, and yet be destitute of real piety. An individual may have a lamp and no oil in the vessel,—“a form of godliness without its power;” and a church may have a name to live, and yet be dead, or may have “things which remain, and which are ready to die.” Such a state is most dangerous; and, if it continues, the consequences must be, beyond expression, fearful. Everything should be done to prevent it; and all appointed means should be resorted to, that religion in its power may prevail in the communion of the Church. While it is the gracious presence of the Redeemer in ordinances, and the power of the Spirit alone that can confer spiritual life in the Church, or continue and increase it; there are certain divinely-appointed means, which are adapted to call into exercise devotional feelings, and to promote the cause of vital godliness. Of these a high place must be assigned to intercourse with lively Christians,

¹ A notable illustration of the remark in the text occurs in what is recorded of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at the era of the Revolution. Those who carefully maintained the ordinance of private social fellowship preserved among them purity of doctrine, a testimony for precious truth and godly practice, and their successors have done so till the present day; whereas those who forsook the assembling of themselves together, and fell in with the Revolution Church, not only abandoned the testimony of their fathers, but opened a wide door for the admission of grievous error in doctrine, laxity of discipline, and irreligious practice. Recent movements in ecclesiastical bodies, both in these countries and in America, supply illustrations which should be carefully considered, of the connection between the observance of private Christian fellowship, and the maintenance of sound doctrine and godly practice, and show likewise that neglect of private social prayer leads to departure from the faith and declension in godliness.

² Hebrews x. 25; Revelation iii. 10.

and to societies for spiritual converse and united prayer. "*Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*"¹ Even occasional conversation with a prayerful, spiritually-minded person, will often make a deep impression of the importance of Divine things, and will stimulate to the exercises of devotion. Who has not felt, when privileged with enjoying the company of a decided Christian, as if breathing for the time a purer atmosphere; and after retiring from it, who has not been sensible of the awful power and attractive sweetness of real holiness?

In the stated Fellowship Meeting, religious knowledge is presented not in the abstract form, or as matter of speculative belief merely, but as intended to affect and purify the heart, as the food and life of the soul, and as supplying copious matter for prayer and praise to devout worshippers. All the exercises of these associations are fitted to fan the flame of intelligent piety, and to promote true devotion. Meeting with brethren who cherish mutual lively affection, and who have confidence in each other, has a solemnizing and animating effect. The reading of God's Word in company, and in portions chosen with reference to the circumstances of assembled brethren; and the joint confessions, supplications, and thanksgivings of brethren, who are of one heart and one mind, eminently conduce to elevate the heart, and to lead to a higher measure of spirituality and devotion. Here *the sympathy of numbers* gathered together in pursuit of the most important objects, acts most advantageously; and the united petitions of devout worshippers are wafted on high, and come into God's holy temple. The showers of blessing which they draw down often water and refresh the heritage of the Lord. The social prayer-meeting is singularly adapted to withdraw the mind of those who attend it from the engrossing pursuits and cares of the world. It comes in as a blessed means of calling away the mind and heart to seek "those things which are above;" and its hallowed exercises enable the Christian to overcome the world, and to go on through the wilderness "leaning on the Beloved." Every part of this delightful service seems as if specially provided to fan the flame of pure and heavenly devotion, and to promote abiding healthful piety in the life and conduct.

The experience of the Church in all past ages has proved that associations for private Christian fellowship have eminently tended to cherish and increase the piety of their members.

¹ Proverbs xxvii. 17.

Wherever they have existed and been diligently attended, vital religion has flourished; and those who delighted in them have been generally distinguished for activity and energy in religion. To the Fellowship Meeting, beyond question, those sections of the Church that have maintained this institution have been largely indebted for the existence and vigour of piety exhibited by their members. The fire enkindled on this altar has continued to burn from generation to generation; and when other portions of the Christian community have declined in doctrine and practice, pure and undefiled religion has kept pace with this excellent ordinance. All past history warrants the conclusion that the revival and extension of associations for private Christian fellowship would greatly contribute to the promotion of true devotion and genuine piety.

Fifthly. *The private Fellowship Meeting tends powerfully to minister support and comfort to Christians in trials, and leads to a faithful discharge of all the duties which are dictated by brotherly love.* The people of God are in a world where evil abounds, and they are reminded that in it they shall have tribulation. The afflictions that befall them arise from various sources, and to them not unfrequently is allotted more than an ordinary share of bodily or mental suffering. Besides the assurance that to the saints trouble is unstinged, that to them it is a part of the dispensation of the covenant of peace, and a token of Fatherly love, there are *two* principal grounds of support and consolation to them under affliction. These are—*First*, The presence and sympathy of Christ, their Elder Brother; and *secondly*, the sympathy of fellow-Christians with them in trials. Of the Saviour, in relation to the sufferings of his people, it was declared long before He came in the flesh, "In all their affliction He was afflicted;"¹ and now that his great work on earth has been finished, his unchangeable character is proclaimed, "He can have a fellow-feeling for our infirmities, for He was in all points tempted (tried) as we are, yet without sin."²

The sympathy of real Christians one with another is intimate and tender, powerful and lasting. It springs from their union to the same glorious Head, and from their incorporation into one mystical spiritual body: "We are members one of another." "If one member suffer, all the rest suffer with it; and if one rejoice, all rejoice together." The expression of this sympathy has ever been sweet to the wounded and tried spirit, potent to assuage grief and to impart holy consolation. While it must

¹ Isaiah lxiii. 9.

² Hebrews iv. 15.

in the nature of the case exist among all who belong to the family of God, there is need of a special provision for its appropriate and vigorous exercise. This is found in select associations for Christian fellowship. Frequenting these assemblies, Christians become familiarly known to one another, and they are united more closely in the bonds of sanctified and endeared friendship. Their individual wants, trials, and conflicts become known to beloved brethren; and they feel it to be no common privilege to unbosom their sorrows to those who regard it as their solemn duty to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Then to be remembered in prayer by fellow-saints is a great support under trial; and the words which are spoken by those who have been themselves in trouble, and their fervent intercessions, are as balm to the afflicted spirit—if they do not remove the trial, they tend greatly to alleviate it. It has been observed, that when prayer-meetings are conducted in a lively manner, the afflicted and mourners cling, in times of distress, to brethren with whom they have had sweet fellowship in the social assembly; and these again manifest more than an ordinary portion of Christian affection, by their attention to the sorrowful and the afflicted. After seasons of affliction, too, and when trials have passed away, believers return to the assembly for prayer and spiritual converse with peculiar desire and delight. Like good Hezekiah, they have sought of the Lord a "sign" whereby they may go up, not only to the sanctuary, but likewise to the place of united prayer and praise. As the apostles, when they were injuriously treated by the Jewish rulers, and dismissed from the tribunal, went to their "own company," and invited brethren to rejoice with them that they were accounted "worthy to suffer shame for the name's sake of Jesus;" so the saints, in repairing to the social prayer-meeting, to give thanks for deliverances received, return *to their company*; and their praises are more cordial and elevated, that other dear brethren join them in the song of gratitude. At the deathbed itself, the members of the prayer-meeting gather together, as friends united in Christ so as never to part; and when death dissolves their fellowship on earth, survivors are enabled to cherish the enlivening hope that they will shortly realize with departed friends a loftier communion in glory which shall know no change or termination. As it is recorded of the proto-martyr Stephen, that "devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him,"¹ so not unfre-

¹ Acts viii. 2.

quently the chief mourners at the funeral of a saint are the brethren of the same prayer-meeting. While to the opened grave they commit all that is earthly of a departed friend, in certain hope of a blessed resurrection, they learn themselves to live more amid the realities of the world to come; and the fellowship meeting is endeared to them as a precious institution in which believers are trained for the inheritance in glory, and in which they were animated to follow them who now "through faith and patience inherit the promises." The power of Christian principle and sympathy operates, too, in these associations, to lead to the faithful and active discharge of all other duties of Christian fellowship. Believers learn to love one another with a pure heart fervently; and, "as the elect of God, to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering."¹

Sixthly. These associations tend to excite and increase a *public and liberal spirit*. Vigorous and influential piety is always indicated by a public spirit and by Christian liberality. The love of Christ *constrains* its subjects to live not to themselves. True Christianity elevates those who feel its power above low selfish aims and pursuits, and leads them to adopt as the motto of their character and life, "NONE OF US LIVETH TO HIMSELF, AND NO MAN DIETH TO HIMSELF."² The advancement of the Redeemer's glory in the earth—the promotion of Zion's good—and the benefit of fellow-men, are objects which appear to the true believer of paramount and unspeakable importance, far above any mere personal interest of his own. Hence he labours to "do good as he has opportunity." In the fellowship of the Church, he learns to weep with them that weep, and to rejoice with them that rejoice. Desiring above all the revival and prosperity of the Church, he can make the avowal, "*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.*"³ This public spirit embraces the whole interests of the Redeemer's glory, and impels those who feel its power to labour, and expend worldly means and make sacrifices for the relief of the distressed, and for the promotion of the cause of truth and righteousness in the earth. Its appropriate exercise is a source of happiness. In devising "liberal things," the "liberal soul" is, in terms of the Divine assurance, "made fat," and the experience is realized—

¹ Colossians iii. 12.² Romans xiv. 7.³ Psalm cxxxvii. 5, 6.

"IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE."¹ Whatever tends to impress upon Christians the great truth that *they are not their own*, and that *they are not to live to themselves*; whatever excites them to Christian liberality is to them of eminent advantage, as it raises them above the natural selfishness of the heart, exemplifies the power and excellence of our holy religion, and fits them for co-operating in the Saviour's designs of mercy and love towards our world. In all past ages, it has been by means of public-spirited and liberal men that the cause of philanthropy has been advanced, that the Church has been revived, extended, and built up, and that the Saviour's glory has been promoted in the earth. Thus, too, we have reason to think, the cause of true religion will achieve her ultimate glorious triumphs. Men of an enlarged public spirit will be raised up, a devoted instrumentality will go forth to the work of the Lord, and the offerings of Christian liberality will be greatly increased, in the approaching era of Zion's brightness and glory.

Fellowship meetings have a manifest tendency to excite and invigorate this spirit, thereby furnishing another proof that they are inseparably connected with a healthy tone of genuine piety. Christians in this ordinance are drawn closely together. Intelligence is circulated concerning the cause of true religion in the earth; and the public interests of the Church—her spiritual condition, her revival and extension—naturally claim a prominent place in the converse and united prayers of God's people. The members are thus brought to feel that they have an individual and very deep interest in all that pertains to the cause of genuine religion and philanthropy. In the day of trial to the Church, they sustain each other's drooping spirits, remembering and pleading the Divine promises; and then and at other times, the hearts of the faithful are comforted and encouraged by the prospects of Zion's future enlargement and glory. The dispositions excited and cherished in these associations serve signally to promote the cause of truth and godliness. Believers are united in the common belief of the truth, the heart is warmed and elevated in Christian affection, and the active powers are stimulated to the pursuit of worthy and ennobling objects.

In point of fact, the fellowship prayer-meeting has ever been an eminent means of cultivating a public spirit, and of exciting to holy liberality. In apostolic times, primitive believers abounding in united prayer overcame the world, and were

¹ Acts xx. 35.

distinguished for self-denied liberality and holy devotedness. In the fresh impulse of their first love, none of them said that aught of the things he possessed was his own, but "*they had all things common.*" Disregarding ease and earthly possessions, and life itself, they became the honoured instruments of diffusing the Saviour's light and salvation throughout the nations. In other ages, too, the social prayer-meeting has called into exercise a like public liberal spirit, and has led to similar zealous, self-denied exertions for the propagation of truth. Modern missionary efforts have, to a great extent, originated in meetings for united prayer and mutual Christian converse; and the liberality with which evangelical missions have been sustained is the fruit of such associations. Christians who take delight in associating with fellow-believers for stated prayer, very generally excel others in the manifestation of a public and liberal spirit. Members of the Church, even in an humble rank of life, frequenting these meetings, have learned to carry away from them a heartfelt concern about the state of religion in the Church, to contribute cheerfully, and to put forth strenuous exertions for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in the earth. The author has had frequent opportunities of marking with interest this display of a public spirit, in connection with the hallowed exercises of the prayer-meeting. From close and extensive observation, he considers himself warranted to say that he has never known any who gave clear evidence of receiving spiritual benefit from the fellowship meeting, and of imparting it to others, who were not at the same time characterized by a public spirit, and who were not ready on befitting occasions to show Christian liberality.¹

¹ The instances are not few, and they afford the most pleasing remembrance, in which members of the social prayer-meeting, male and female, and some of them in very humble circumstances of life, in connection with his own flock, have shown, in the best sense of the phrase, a public spirit, and given singular proofs of Christian liberality. So marked and observable has been the influence of these associations in maintaining this spirit, that the writer has been accustomed to look chiefly to those who delighted in the prayer-meeting, and were profitable members of it, to evince a lively interest in the Church's welfare, the conversion of the nations, and the relief of the distressed; and from such he has ever calculated on receiving for these objects the spontaneous fruits of Christian liberality. Does not such experience supply a powerful motive to ministers and Christian philanthropists to promote the establishment of fellowship meetings; and to labour to render this ordinance, where it has been established, eminent for holy zeal, and instinct with spiritual vigour? If we would desire to see prevailing in the Church healthful piety, we must contribute our utmost endeavours to unite its members in fellowship meetings, and to enkindle the spirit of fraternal affection and holy zeal in this association.

Finally. The Fellowship Meeting has a *happy influence upon all other religious duties*, public and private, personal and relative. While every duty of religion properly performed has a favourable effect upon all others, united prayer has a special and most salutary influence. Private prayer and devout meditation on the Word prepare for fellowship with Christian brethren; and this again sends the believer back, with enlarged views and desires of heart, to enjoy in the closet the sweets of communion with God, and to pour out his heart at the mercy-seat. Difficulties that had been felt in secret, and doubts and fears that had oppressed the mind, are dispelled by means of spiritual converse; and the Christian counsels, and fervent prayers of brethren, help the traveller to Zion to go on his way rejoicing. How frequently has the happy influence of the prayer-meeting been felt on the family! Believing parents, taking with them their children, and feeling in their intercourse with brethren that their cases and those of their families were subjects of affectionate interest and earnest prayer with others, have returned with joy to bless their household, and with renewed confidence and hope, to perform domestic duties and endure domestic trials. When deeply concerned about the spiritual interests of their children, how often have the hearts of godly fathers and mothers been strengthened and encouraged by knowing, as they attended on the prayer-meeting, that believing brethren were bearing their burdens, and were wrestling in prayer in behalf of those who were to them objects of heartfelt anxiety! Who can tell, moreover, how many wayward and backsliding children have been reclaimed in answer to such prayers, or how many of Zion's children have by such means become partakers of the grace that bringeth salvation!

The influence of social prayer upon *the public ordinances of religion* has often been most salutary and powerful. The joint supplications of two or three meeting in Christ's name excite desires after the privileges of the sanctuary, and at the same time form a suitable preparation for their enjoyment. Christian conversation brings out the sweetness and fulness of the Word, fixes it in the remembrance of the heart, and leads to receive it with quickened appetite and relish from the lips of the Lord's messenger. The prayers of the assembled people of God are of special benefit to the ministers of the Word. In the fellowship meeting, the public servants of God are particularly remembered in prayer; and many fervent petitions are offered up in their behalf. Ministers when present have had

their minds solemnized; and while made to feel in connection with such exercises the awful importance and responsibility of their office and work, they have, at the same time, received encouragement and renewed strength for their arduous service. Often, too, when engaged in the work of the sanctuary, and enduring the anxieties and trials of the ministry, they have been sustained and comforted in knowing that an attached people were pouring out fervent and united prayers on their behalf—they have been led to expect the blessing that was sought for them so earnestly in the public assemblies of God's people.

It was, doubtless, under the conviction of the value of such united spiritual prayers, and of their connection with the success of the Word, that the Apostle Paul said once and again in writing to the churches, "Brethren, pray for us." "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."¹ If an apostle, who enjoyed the inspiration and infallible guidance of the Spirit, confessed his need of help from the prayers of the brotherhood of faith, how much more should ministers of the Word now feel their value and earnestly solicit them! The direction and support of ministers, their comfort and progress in study, and the success of the messages they deliver, are greatly dependent on this instrumentality. The design for which united prayer is sought for the ministry, how momentous!—"THAT THE WORD OF THE LORD MAY HAVE FREE COURSE AND BE GLORIFIED." Thus is a "door of utterance" opened, and a "door of entrance administered." The seed sown falls into hearts prepared as good ground; the dews of the Spirit descend and water it, and in due time it springs up and bears plentiful fruit, to the honour of the Great Husbandman.

Numerous are the instances on record in which the salutary effects of united prayer have been felt and acknowledged, in directing and sustaining in other important duties. In periods of revival, this connection has been eminently conspicuous. At the memorable era of the Second Reformation in Scotland, we are told that at the celebrated Glasgow Assembly of 1638, Alexander Henderson, who, as moderator, guided with such wisdom and firmness the deliberations, was accustomed often,

¹ 1 Thessalonians v. 25; 2 Thessalonians iii. 1; Romans xv. 30.

after presiding during the day, to spend a considerable portion of the night with brethren of a like spirit in prayer and consultation about the interests of Zion. From these nocturnal prayer-meetings, he doubtless derived renewed strength for his arduous public duties, and through this channel descended a remarkable blessing upon the proceedings of this admirable assembly. The biographer of Whitefield relates that, at the time of his greatest success in London, after preaching, sometimes twice and thrice in the day, he frequently spent time till a late hour of the night, in united prayer with the awakened and Christian brethren at the Tabernacle. Who can tell how much the display of Divine power that took place under Whitefield's ministry was the fruit of these fervent prayers, his own, and those of others who co-operated with him in his important mission?

Within the last fifty years, when the adherents of a covenanted testimony in the south of Scotland were accustomed to collect together from great distances to communions, it was usual for the various prayer-meetings, of which scattered congregations were composed, to meet on Friday, immediately after the day of fasting, not unfrequently in a field in the open air, and after spending some time, in separate groups, in united prayer and other religious exercises, a minister or licentiate came forth in the evening and preached to the societies, then gathered into one assembly. The testimony of aged members of the Church is, that these services were singularly refreshing, and were often eminently blessed, as a means of preparation for the holy solemnity. The practice still followed of the different fellowship meetings of the congregations of the Covenanting Church in the north of Ireland convening for special prayer and spiritual converse, on a similar occasion, has been felt to have a happy influence on all the succeeding services. Such instances, and many similar might be added, go to prove that, for quickening and comfort in all religious duties, and for bringing forth and maturing the profitable fruits of righteousness, social private prayer has ever been an eminent instrumentality.¹

¹ It is related that when Lord Cornwallis was in command of the army in Ireland, at the period of the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a pious soldier was brought before him for disobeying the orders of an inferior officer, by attending prayer-meetings among his fellow-soldiers at a late hour at night. Instead of reprimanding him, the general asked him to pray in his presence; and when the soldier, nothing confounded, gave utterance to the feelings of his heart in prayer, he dismissed him with the remark, that as he was so

conscientious in attending to his religious duties, he was sure he would not fail in his duty to his king and country, and with expressing at the same time his desire that he had many such soldiers in his army. Of those who displayed the most intrepid valour in the campaign now in the Crimea, it is pleasing to record that not a few, both soldiers and officers, have been accustomed to associate together for united prayer. The 93d Regiment distinguished themselves and suffered severely at the battle of Alma; and many of them, while in Scotland, it is said, were members of prayer-meetings and teachers in the Sabbath-school. The value of Christian fellowship was felt and confessed by them, on the battle-field, and amid scenes of carnage. For striking instances of the influence of united prayer upon other duties, sometimes difficult and perilous, see an excellent little work by the late Dr Innes of Edinburgh, entitled, *The Church in the Army*.

CHAPTER VI.

RULES FOR ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

FROM the views that have been advanced in the preceding chapters, we may assume that the scriptural obligation of private Christian fellowship is admitted; and that the *advantages* to be derived from such association are seen to be excellent and manifold. If the sentiments which have been propounded are accordant with the dictates of inspiration, then it concerns all who desire the prevalence of true religion, to adopt *practical* measures for the revival and general observance of an ordinance which has distinguished the Church in her purest and best days, and which is uniformly represented in the Divine Word, as intimately connected with the future glory of the Redeemer's kingdom.

A Manual for the proper management of fellowship meetings is at present required in the Church, as its judicious use would be calculated to subserve important purposes. Some may admit the principles which have been elucidated, who may yet find difficulties in their application. There are others who, convinced of the value of the prayer-meeting, set themselves to originate observances which bear some resemblance to the scriptural institute, while yet important parts of the ordinance are overlooked and neglected, and the desired objects are not attained.

The rules which are subjoined cannot lay claim to express scriptural sanction, nor are they offered, as applicable in every particular to the management of fellowship meetings, in all circumstances, and wherever they may be established. They appear, however, to be recommended by Christian prudence, as accordant with the nature and design of the institution, and as a proper application of the principles which regulate its organization and establishment. They are based upon the admitted principle that "there are circumstances in the government and worship of the Church, common to human actions

and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed ;"¹ and they are recommended, as having been tested by Christian experience. While other ways of promoting associations for united prayer in the Church have very generally failed, the observance of these rules has contributed not only to maintain Christian fellowship in circumstances of difficulty and trial, but has likewise been a means of realizing the blessing connected with the institution. A full directory for fellowship meetings is a desideratum. To present this, however, would be inconsistent with the design and limits of this work : instead, we submit a brief compend of practical rules, which, it is presumed, will be found serviceable in promoting an organization of singular value throughout the Church.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS.²

I. *Organization of the Fellowship Meeting.*

1. Practical obedience to the Saviour's new commandment should be assumed as the basis of all fellowship meetings ; and in the spirit of it are they to be conducted. For exemplifying to the world the love of true disciples, and as an eminent means of cultivating the love of the brethren, they should be established. Christians are thus to receive one another in love, for the glory of Christ and for their mutual comfort and profit.

2. Wherever Christians holding the same views of truth and Christian duty, are in Divine providence brought together, even where no congregation has been organized, they should form among themselves a stated social prayer-meeting. This has frequently proved a happy means of spiritual edification, and has led, in many cases, to the organization of congregations for

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chap. i. sect. 6.

² These directions are, to a considerable extent, selected from a *Short Directory for Religious Societies*, "drawn up by the appointment of the Reformed Presbytery in 1782," which has long been in the hands of the members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in this country ; and from a *Guide to Private Social Worship*, prepared by the late Dr Andrew Symington, D.D., by appointment of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod in Scotland. In these little works, the nature and obligations of fellowship meetings are well illustrated. We have aimed to simplify the arrangement of the "Directions," and to apply the principles to cases which are at present of great practical importance.

public worship, and to the establishment of a stated ministry. Among emigrants in distant lands, and converts from corrupt and idolatrous systems, and in places where a faithful profession and godly practice are little known, such an association is calculated to be productive of eminent advantage.

3. As the institution of private Christian fellowship is designed to embrace the whole Church, as many societies of this kind as possible should be established in each congregation; and all the members of the Church should consider themselves as under special obligation to be connected, each member with a particular society. Their own edification and comfort, as well as their usefulness in the Church, require them to enter willingly into such an association.

4. As private social prayer should be regarded as essential to the welfare of the Church, it is proper that, in the case of an organized congregation, the fellowship meeting should be formally established by the eldership of the Church, and that it should be placed under the superintendence of the office-bearers in the house of God.¹

II. Members of the Fellowship Meeting.

1. Those who are in the full fellowship of the Church should seek to be members of the social prayer-meeting. The children of Church members should be also required early to attend, an account should be regularly taken of their attendance, and attention should be always shown to the young at the meetings by catechizing and special instructions adapted to their capacity.

2. The aim should constantly be to have all the members of a congregation, male and female, thus associated together; and besides, persons of serious, religious habits, who attend upon the public ministrations of the Word, and manifest regard to a scriptural profession, are to be admitted and encouraged to attend the fellowship meeting, if they express a desire to this effect. These are not, however, to be called to

¹ In the Reformed Presbyterian Church, when a new prayer-meeting is to be established, the minister or a ruling elder attends, by appointment of the session, and formally organizes it, giving suitable directions for its future management. Throughout the congregations, one or more fellowship meetings are placed under the care of each elder, who visits them regularly, and reports their state to the session. The societies are likewise visited on stated occasions by the minister, as a special part of his pastoral duty.

take part in conducting the religious exercises, but may join in the religious conversation, and receive the edification connected with the whole social worship. For the sake of good order, it is proper that the admission of this class of persons to sit in society should be proposed by a member of the meeting, and concurred in by the rest of the brethren.¹

3. As the promise of the Redeemer's gracious presence is assured to two or three meeting in his name, such a number may constitute a social prayer-meeting. In general, from eight to twelve members of the Church residing in the same locality may suitably form a society. It is proper when the number of constituent members is largely increased, to separate by mutual agreement, so as to form two or more smaller societies.

III. *Time and way of conducting the Social Exercises.*

1. Fellowship meetings should be held on the Lord's day, when the members have not access to public ordinances dispensed in purity; and on such occasions, a larger portion of time should be spent in the social religious exercises, than at other times of assembling.²

2. As a principal object of the social prayer-meeting is to keep alive constantly religious impressions, and to seek the blessing upon all other ordinances of religion, the members should meet together *weekly*, except when hindered by distance or unavoidable circumstances; in other cases, the meetings should be held not less frequently than *every alternate week*.

¹ From the nature of Christian fellowship, it seems to be required that the social prayer-meeting should be so conducted that all the members of the Church should take an active part in the religious exercises. The method which is common in our day of having a single prayer-meeting in a congregation, attended often by very few members, and conducted only by the minister, or an office-bearer of the Church, presents no proper example of the fellowship meeting. It is still worse when the person or persons, who assume to lead in the religious exercises, are known not to be of prayerful habits or distinguished for godly practice. Need we wonder that the attendance, in such a case, is meagre and unsatisfactory; and that such associations linger out a feeble existence, till they expire? Prayer-meetings in any form can never be properly kept up, when the members are persons who do not practise secret prayer, or who neglect family-worship.

² "On Sabbath-days, it is proper that such societies should convene about the ordinary time that public worship begins, and that they spend that time in these private social exercises, which they have not access to spend in public worship; this is the next most profitable way of employing sacred time."—*Short Directory for Religious Societies*, p. 24.

3. Members should regard the time set apart for this ordinance as sacred. They should therefore make all proper arrangements that other engagements do not interfere with it, should attend punctually at the appointed hour of meeting, and should discover, during the exercises, deep and heartfelt interest in the proceedings. In all ordinary cases, the length of time spent in the exercises should not exceed *two hours*. Hence it becomes necessary to study to be brief and comprehensive in the exercises of social worship, and in spiritual converse.

4. The exercises of the social meeting should be commenced precisely at the appointed hour. Those who come forward late, owe an explanation to their brethren, and from them, and from those who were absent from the previous meeting, such an explanation should be asked by the member presiding, and should be frankly given. Persons who are negligent in their attendance, or who are in the habit of coming forward late, should be admonished by their brethren, in the spirit of fidelity and love. If members are absent from the meetings of the society twice or thrice in succession, without any known cause, they should be waited on by brethren appointed for that purpose, and exhorted in relation to their duty. Should individuals, after such admonitions, continue negligent or irregular in their attendance, it may be proper to report the matter to the office-bearers of the Church, and to regard those who are thus amiss as not entitled to the full privileges of the society till they amend.

The exercises of the social prayer-meeting are praise, prayer, reading the Word, and spiritual converse upon the truths of the Scriptures. At times it may be profitable to give and receive select intelligence respecting the state of the Church, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom; to read and converse upon portions of the Church's testimony; and to engage in the duties of fraternal reproof and exhortation. The members of the social meeting should also, on particular calls in Providence, hold special assemblies for solemn fasting and humiliation, and for united thanksgiving.

5. As all the members meet as brethren, and in terms of equality, they should therefore be required, in *regular rotation*, to conduct the devotional exercises. The services may be suitably commenced by invoking the Divine presence and the aid of the Spirit, then engaging in united praise, reading the Word, and prayer. The member who opens the society, for

sake of decent order, should act as president during the meeting, proposing to the members separately the subject of religious conversation, and directing the order of the different services.

6. After the discussion of the subject of religious converse, the next member in rotation on the roll should be called to conduct devotional exercises by reading the Word, praise, and prayer; and after a subject for conversation at the next meeting shall have been proposed, and any other matters attended to that the interests of the society or the Church shall seem to require, either the same member or another may conclude, by brief thanksgiving and prayer, and by singing a portion of psalmody. It may be profitable for edification to vary the exercises at these meetings, by reading and commenting occasionally on portions of the Church's confession and testimony, instead of discussing a scriptural passage.

7. The subjects of religious converse at the social prayer-meetings should be the truths of the Divine Word relating to doctrine and godly practice. In general, the subject should be proposed, in the form of a question, at one meeting, and discussed at the following. Each member, male or female, has the privilege of submitting such a question. The subject of religious converse should be presented, not for gratifying curiosity, or for controversy chiefly, and least of all for the display of abilities, but to promote Christian edification and true godliness. It should therefore be carefully considered by those who propose it, and should be attentively studied by the members who discuss it.¹ The members should consider it culpable either to neglect to study the subject of religious converse, or to be altogether silent when it is discussed in the society. As the social prayer-meeting partakes of the character of a private *conversational* party, female as well as male members should regard it as their duty to contribute their part to the edification and mutual help of all the society. It appears proper, when females and youthful members are backward to

¹ "Subjects should be *selected* for conversation to promote godly edifying, not to indulge curiosity or strife; and subjects should be taken up in pleasing variety and rotation. The doctrines of the cross, the privileges of the covenant of grace, the internal spiritual exercises of the saints, the holy duties of Christianity, the institutions and order of the Christian Church, the spiritual design of these institutions, the Word of the Redeemer's patience, the dispensations of Divine providence towards the members, in the Church and in the world, should, in instructive variety, be brought under review in the conference of Christian brethren." — *Guide to Private Social Worship*, pp. 35, 36.

speak on the subject of religious conversation, to require them to select and read appropriate portions of Scripture, explaining and applying the subject. Thus they will themselves receive spiritual benefit by searching the Scriptures; and others may be edified in perceiving the fulness of the Word, and by Scripture appearing as its own interpreter.

8. Besides conversing together in the social prayer-meeting, on the great questions of the Word and the duties of Christianity, it may be most profitable at times to speak to one another in relation to things of public interest to the Church, and on subjects of personal experience, such as the graces, the trials, or conflicts of believers.

IV. *Manner of conducting the business of Fellowship Meetings.*

1. Members should seek for themselves, and endeavour to promote in others, spirituality of mind and a true devotional spirit. They should remember that they are gathered together in the name of Christ, that they should fervently desire his gracious presence, and aim to give evidence that they have realized it. The whole exercises are to be regarded as acts of religious worship, and everything inconsistent with such a solemn position is to be carefully avoided.

2. A Christian *loving spirit* should uniformly pervade these meetings. Hence a supercilious, overbearing, censorious frame of mind is, above all things, to be avoided. "Members should meet in the spirit of mutual subjection, honouring one another," and preferring one another. They should watch, in the meeting, and when going to it or retiring from it, against remarks that would seem to indicate slighting or want of interest and affection towards brethren. The great aim of this association is to display in its power the charity that thinketh no evil, that covers a multitude of sins, and that disposes Christians to edify each other in love. Church members should always avoid *giving offence* to brethren. If offences come, when they are of a private nature, they should be adjusted by mutual explanations and concessions of the parties themselves. The fellowship meeting, without claiming or exercising any judicial power, may be of use in removing offences, either by dealing with the parties, in the spirit of meekness and fidelity, when they are present at the meeting, or by employing a member or members, in a more private

way, to reconcile them. Public scandals do not come properly under the cognizance of the fellowship meeting, but of the judicatories of the Church.

3. The members of the social prayer-meeting should ever manifest a deep and heartfelt interest in all the brethren. In cases of outward affliction or distress, bodily or mental, they should visit one another, and make their circumstances matter of united prayer in the meetings. They should hold themselves ready to relieve cases of temporal distress of their brethren; and it may be proper, where members are prevented, through age or protracted affliction, from attending public or social ordinances, to hold occasional meetings of the society with them in their dwellings.

4. The devotional exercises should ordinarily be short, though not formal; the remarks made upon the topic of conversation should be brief and appropriate; those which have been already made by members should not be repeated by others. Individuals should guard against occupying the time of others by much speaking, and the services should be throughout conducted so as not to produce weariness. The *manner*, too, of conducting the services is important. The Scriptures should be read with due solemnity, the praises of God sung with grave, sweet melody, and observations on the subject of conversation should be made audibly and intelligibly.

5. As in the fellowship of the Church, the strong should help the weak, and all should seek to promote the edification of the whole body; when new societies are established, it is proper that some members of adjacent societies should meet with their brethren for some time, for their help and encouragement. When societies have been divided into two smaller associations, meeting in separate places, the members should, for a time at least, occasionally correspond, by meeting together, in remembrance of their former intimate fellowship.

To promote the extended fellowship of the brethren, a method of *general correspondence* throughout a congregation has often been found beneficial. Societies exchange visits by mutual delegation, and on such occasions they not only take sweet counsel together, in solemn devotional exercises, and spiritual converse on the Word, but they affectionately inquire of the welfare and trials of each other, and tender to one another mutual exhortation and encouragement. Periodical meetings of delegates from all the societies of a congregation, held either quarterly or half-yearly, have been found an excellent means of

promoting the unity of the Church, keeping alive the love of the brethren, and of stimulating Church members to the active discharge of all commanded duties. At these meetings, besides attending to the external concerns of the house of God, it is proper to propose special inquiries concerning the state of each particular fellowship meeting; and the delegates, as united in the bond of a sacred brotherhood, should seek to advance the prosperity of every separate society.¹

6. The various societies for united prayer should consider that they have been associated together for the performance of important *public works*—for the advancement of the Redeemer's glory in the earth. This is a machinery admirably adapted for conducting every department of benevolent Christian effort. The members of a fellowship prayer-meeting should regard it as their special duty to promote *missions* to the destitute and neglected in their own neighbourhood. They should act as a Bible Society, and should feel themselves called to instruct the ignorant around out of the Word, and should consult and pray and labour to promote missions to perishing men throughout the world. Fellowship meetings vigorously conducted may become, under the Divine blessing, the germs of congregations, and they may be a happy instrumentality for the revival of religion among themselves and throughout the Church. Encouraged by our Lord's assurance, "If any two of you on earth shall agree to ask the Father in heaven, it shall be given you," they should betake themselves to such a work; they should consult together, and pray unitedly and fervently for such ends. The prayer-meetings of the Church may thus become so many "*centres of light*" in the world. Blessed themselves, they may dispense blessings to others even in distant places and throughout future generations.²

7. As it is essential to Christian fraternal fellowship that brethren, meeting for united prayer and conference, should use

¹ See Appendix.

² In various congregations of the Church, it has been found an efficient means of promoting the cause of missions, to raise contributions for this object at each social meeting. These contributions are furnished, either by casting voluntary offerings into boxes kept in the society, or by members enrolling their names in a book provided for the purpose, and contributing regularly according to their engagement—all recognizing the obligation to dedicate some portion of their substance for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom in the earth. The latter method has been found the most efficient; and the youth of the Church should be employed and encouraged in such an undertaking.

in their intercourse the utmost Christian freedom, and should speak to one another in love and confidence, it should be regarded as obligatory upon the members individually not to *report abroad* what is transacted in the society; and they should consider themselves as solemnly bound never to say or do anything that would mar the edification or comfort either of the whole society or of any particular member.

SPIRIT OF THE DUTY.

Besides the special rules for the organization and management of prayer-meetings, which have been given in the preceding pages, we subjoin some directions in relation to the *spirit* in which the duty is to be observed. Redundancy of counsel on such a subject will not be regarded as superfluous by those who feel the importance and value of this institution, and who desire to promote throughout the Church its general observance and efficiency.

First of all. *Excuses* for neglecting social prayer should not be indulged, and *evils* that prevent its proper observance should be watched against and avoided. As in reference to other religious duties, the excuses offered for the neglect of fellowship meetings are manifold. However plausibly advanced, or with whatever apparent sincerity, they too often indicate that there is no heart to the duty, and that the individual who presents them has no right impression of the paramount claims of personal religion, or of the necessity of diligence and perseverance in its pursuit. To be fertile in making excuse is a sure sign of the want of personal interest in the privileges of true religion; and against such as are thus characterized is issued the sentence of final exclusion, "*None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*"¹ There is generally much self-deception here. A due consideration of the authority by which the duty is enjoined and enforced, and of the eminent benefits which result from proper attendance upon the ordinance, would show the excuses that are advanced for neglecting it to be futile, frivolous, and sinful.

The *want of time* is alleged, for instance, as an excuse for non-attendance. The engrossing pursuits of worldly business are pleaded as requiring constant attention; attendance upon other religious duties, in public and private, interferes with

¹ Luke xiv. 24.

the observance of the fellowship meeting, and many occasional interruptions hinder punctuality of attendance, even where the duty is recognized, and the individual has been brought into connection with the ordinance. A proper consideration of the value of time as a "talent" to be occupied for the honour of Him who confers it, and who has a paramount claim upon all our time, would at once show the futility of all such excuses. Christian fellowship is among the highest of our religious privileges. The social prayer-meeting is one of the most precious opportunities of religious improvement. We should continually recognize our obligation to *redeem* time. We should beware of indulging a worldly spirit. What we gain of earthly things in the pursuit of business, in time abstracted from any religious duty—private, domestic, or public, to which we have a proper call—can yield no real profit or enjoyment. The maxim is of universal application: "*Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"¹ Time may easily be saved from company-keeping, recreation, and undue indulgence, for religious duties. At most, the period allotted to us on earth is a brief span, given chiefly to prepare for eternity. A small portion is all that is required for the exemplary performance of this duty; and to regard this as sacred and not to encroach upon it, will not only prove beneficial to ourselves, but be of singular benefit to others. It is certain that many servants of God who have been distinguished for punctual attendance upon the social prayer-meeting, have been, at the same time, energetic and successful in outward pursuits; and their experience has uniformly borne testimony, that attention to Christian fellowship has, in no instance, been prejudicial to their worldly interests.² Even when members of the Church are subject to the will of others, Christian wisdom and manly firmness will often obtain for them the valued opportunity for social religious

¹ 1 Timothy iv. 8.

² The writer recollects with pleasure the statement made by an esteemed elder of the Church, who has been active and prosperous in worldly business, and has been long known as a most valuable member of the social prayer-meeting, that, for a period of between thirty and forty years, he was only absent some three or four times from the assemblies of the brethren for prayer and fraternal converse, and these few cases of absence were caused either by personal indisposition, or by domestic affliction and bereavement. In such instances, it has been found that time spent in the prayer-meeting, instead of retarding the active pursuits of worldly business, has tended to recruit both the mind and body, while it served to realize the victory of faith in overcoming the world.

intercourse. When the glory of God, and preparation for heaven, are regarded as the highest objects, persons in almost any condition of life will find little difficulty in obtaining connection with the fellowship meeting, and in maintaining punctuality of attendance.

The excuse is sometimes presented of *deficiency of gifts* for social prayer. Individuals on this ground refuse to enter into the fellowship of the Church where attendance on the prayer-meeting is required, or afterwards forsake the assembling of themselves together. Such a course betrays the absence of a proper sense of the value of Christian privileges, and the want of earnest prayer in secret, by seeking spiritual gifts from God. Gifts are improved by exercise. It is in the way of attending to duty, not of neglecting it, that we obtain strength for its performance. Experience amply shows that persons who have engaged in social duties, under a deep sense of their own unfitness, have often become eminent for Christian improvement and usefulness. Not unfrequently is this excuse the offspring of spiritual pride and sinful shame, and while indulged in, it is a barrier to all improvement. The greater the lack of gifts, the more need has the individual to take all methods of supplying the deficiency. The humblest Christian may impart benefit to others. Even *one talent* is not to be buried in the earth, but to be expended for the glory of the Giver.

It may perhaps be, moreover, alleged, that ready *access to public ordinances, and frequent attendance upon public meetings for religious and benevolent objects*, render the observance of fellowship meetings less necessary, or leave little time for this purpose. These, however, furnish no valid grounds for the neglect of a highly important ordinance. No one duty supersedes another. On the contrary, as private prayer forms the best preparation for the performance of domestic duties, so social prayer will be found both the most suitable preparation for waiting upon public ordinances, and an excellent means of improving the privileges of the sanctuary. Our Lord who went about accompanied by his chosen followers, continually *doing good*, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, frequently took his disciples apart for united fellowship. All religious duties are useful and needed in their place; and the Christian, who is growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, will not readily forsake private fellowship, because he is privileged to go frequently with the multitude to the house of God. While Christian association for benevolent exertion constitutes one of the most pleasing

characteristics of our age, and members of the Church should promote it in all proper ways, this cannot form any valid excuse for neglecting private Christian fellowship. On the other hand, as we have already shown, these meetings furnish the best machinery for benevolent effort; and attendance upon them in a right spirit will assuredly animate to devote the heart and life to labours for the relief of the distressed, and for the world's conversion.

Offences received from brethren should never be pleaded as an excuse for absence from the fellowship meeting. In their present state of imperfection, Christians may expect offences to come, and they should be regarded as a needful trial of faith and other graces. Special care should be taken neither to give nor readily to take offence. In all cases, alienation from brethren should be watched against and avoided. Even where real offence has been given, our primary duty is to "overcome evil with good." The fellowship meeting is too precious a means of spiritual benefit to be forsaken from humour or caprice, or on account of provocations received from brethren. Those who are thus tempted to withdraw should consider the weakness of grace, and the power of corruption in their own hearts; and they should ever remember and practise the Divine directions, "Confess your faults one to another;" "Bear one another's burdens;" "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."¹

Should it be alleged, finally, that the members of the prayer-meeting *are of low attainments*, and that *little profit is to be derived from associating with them*—the individual who makes this excuse should consider whether the fault is not in himself. In the body of Christ, the least member has its assigned place and function, and is needed for the welfare and completeness of the whole. Growing believers learn to esteem brethren highly in love, and to prefer others to themselves. Those who are truly spiritual cherish a low estimate of their own attainments, and are ever ready to confess their obligations to brethren. If a prayer-meeting is in a weak and decayed state, there is the greater need of those who feel and lament this to labour for its revival. Instead of absenting themselves, they should, by punctual attendance, by manifesting a prayerful, loving spirit, and by Christian patience and activity, provoke others to love and good works. In the view of the obligation of this precious

¹ James v. 16; Galatians vi. 2; Ephesians iv. 22.

ordinance, and of the important purposes which it is fitted to subserve, all these excuses must appear futile and unworthy. Christians will give the best evidence of the reality and growth of grace in their hearts, and of their desire to promote the prosperity of the Church by rejecting them entirely. Constrained by the love of Christ, they should live not to themselves. Animated by the bright prospects of the perfect fellowship of the saints in glory, they should be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

As evils to be avoided, may be noticed the *desire of displaying gifts, the spirit of idle speculation, fondness for theological controversy, and arrogant, overbearing, or resentful conduct.* While in certain states of religious society these evils, either in whole or in part, may exist, they should be carefully watched against and avoided, as detrimental to the development of Christian principle, and marring fraternal intercourse. Members of prayer-meetings assemble together not for ostentation, but to receive spiritual benefit, and to instruct and edify one another. Without charity, the most distinguished gifts are nothing. Mere speculative acquaintance with Divine truth, and the power to vanquish an opponent in controversy may be possessed, where the heart is unrenewed, and the Word exerts no sanctifying influence upon the heart or life. The great concerns of the Redeemer's glory, and of personal salvation, form the all-engrossing subjects of Christian intercourse, and furnish abundant matter of social prayer and united praise. Constant watchfulness is required, that nothing low or worldly—nothing that would unsettle or distract the mind, or unfit it for solemn acts of religious worship—nothing of doubtful disputation be introduced into meetings for joint supplication and mutual edification. Arrogant and resentful conduct is, in every instance, incompatible with Christian obligation and profession. It is peculiarly unsuited to the private fellowship of members of the Church—of those who have declared themselves to be partakers of the same hope of the common salvation. Wherever such a disposition manifests itself, profitable intercourse must cease, and the great ends of Christian fellowship be defeated. The members of prayer-meetings should watch and govern their own spirits, and should study to mortify all evil in their tempers. Demeaning themselves in the spirit of humility and mutual subjection, they should respect the judg-

ment of brethren, deal tenderly even with their prejudices, forbear each other in love, and bear one another's burdens, thus fulfilling the law of Christ. No part of the time of a fellowship meeting should ever be occupied in strife or recrimination. The beginning of such evils is like "the letting in of water." While Christians individually watch and pray lest they enter into temptation, they are bound to excite and encourage each other to oppose everything in themselves or others that would obstruct loving and profitable intercourse.

Secondly. The *spirit* to be cherished by those who attend the fellowship meeting deserves consideration. It should be—

1. *Devotional and loving.* A spirit of devotion habitually cherished is characteristic of the existence and growth of true religion. It springs from faith in Christ, and implies supreme love to Him, and constant dependence upon Him in all things. Christians, if they would advance in the Divine life, must labour to have deep and experimental views of the truths of the Word—they must realize the gracious presence of God, and draw all spiritual support and comfort from the person, work, and character of the Saviour. Living in the Spirit, they must also "*walk in the Spirit*," habitually exercising and increasing in grace. By such a spirit they are drawn to associate together for the performance of spiritual services, and fellowship meetings are rendered attractive and profitable. In these assemblies, true devotion finds the desired and appropriate scope for its exercise. Here the flame of piety in the heart is fanned, and fellow-travellers to Zion experience, as the disciples going to Emmaus, "that their hearts burn within them," while they offer up united prayers and praises at the mercy-seat, and while they converse from the Scriptures. A devotional spirit is the very life of the fellowship meeting, and everything opposed to it, in words or mental habits, is wholly unsuited to the ordinance of Christian communion.¹

Sympathizing in common trials is characteristic of true disciples; and to the private prayer-meeting these exercises are eminently appropriate and congenial. A loving spirit is at once

¹ The want of a devotional frame may be said to be a principal reason why members of the Church refrain from attending the social prayer-meeting, and why, in cases where such associations have been established, they have been found in a languishing condition. The pithy remark of the martyr Kenwick is deserving of attention. Speaking of the duty of Christians assembling together in times of trial, and of their cultivating intimate fellowship, he says: "*When the coals are few, they must be drawn the more closely together to cause warmth.*"

the ornament and perfection of Christian character. While all coldness and alienation of heart are utterly incompatible with the social prayer-meeting, this ordinance has ever been found a hallowed means of drawing forth and nourishing the spirit of disinterested benevolence and fraternal affection. Those who attend the fellowship meeting should watch and pray against declension in love, as a main hindrance to all comfortable intercourse, and should habitually aim to have as theirs the distinctive character of primitive believers, "BEHOLD! HOW THESE CHRISTIANS LOVE ONE ANOTHER."

2. *Humility and self-denial* should distinguish the members of the fellowship meeting. Every thing connected with this ordinance is fitted to inspire these dispositions. In it, we are called to draw near God; we sit down at Christ's feet to receive the lessons of his Word, and to copy his blessed example. We profess ourselves to be sinners saved by grace; and we mingle with fellow-saints, who are running the Christian course, and pressing forward to lay hold on the crown of glory. The truths which we contemplate, the exercises in which we engage, the hopes that we entertain, and the discoveries made of our own spirit and frame of heart while occupied in religious duties, all are calculated to teach us the deepest humility. Associating with fellow-Christians, we will often be brought to see and feel the imperfection of our attainments, and the sinfulness of our best services. We should be always ready to deny ourselves for the good of the brethren. Persons of the highest gifts and attainments have no ground of boasting, or of affecting superiority. The highest may learn much that is profitable from the lowest in gifts and station. The prayer-meeting, when rightly conducted, is wonderfully fitted to develop these distinguishing traits of the renewed character; and the display of these is eminently calculated to render the ordinance refreshing and profitable. As the elect of God, believers learn, when associating together, to put on humbleness of mind, bowels of mercy, meekness, long-suffering. They see the excellence of the precept, and tender to it ready obedience, "*Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves.*"¹ "This lowly spirit will regulate temper, and prevent offence from being given, and from being taken; it will prepare the mind for receiving instruction from others; it will give facility to intercourse, excite affection among the members, and invite the

¹ Philipians ii. 3.

gracious presence of Him who is meek and lowly, who resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the lowly." ¹

3. The spirit of *Christian activity* and *punctuality* should distinguish those who frequent the fellowship meeting. Christians are enjoined "so to run, that they may obtain." The representation of one that was singularly distinguished in the Divine life is, "Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." ² This habit of holy diligence and activity is peculiarly needed to promote fraternal intercourse among Christians. A slothful spirit indisposes to the performance of social duties. When it is entertained, individuals become fitful and irregular in their attendance, and neglect to make due preparation for the solemn religious exercises before engaging in them. Indolence in the pursuit of Divine things is most injurious both to those who indulge in it and to others. A spirit of this kind is infectious, and fertile in making excuse. Any trifling obstruction will detain an indolent, inactive person from the fellowship meeting; and such a disposition acquires strength, till those who indulge it, either leave off altogether to do good, or become withered and sapless, even while they observe the outward forms of religion. Our duty is to "gird up the loins" of the mind, in this as in all other religious services. We are commanded to give all "diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." ³ The Christian course is compared to a RACE; and unless it is run with strenuous effort, and persevered in to the end, the prize may not be expected. The Saviour's own example inculcates regular and punctual attendance upon religious ordinances. The *regularity* of his waiting on public ordinances is indicated when it is said, "*As his custom was*, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day;" and we have a striking example of his *punctuality*, when it is said, "*And when the hour was come*, He sat down, and the twelve disciples with Him." ⁴ Punctuality in attending the prayer-meeting should be shown in redeeming from other engagements the period set apart for social intercourse, in being present at the hour of assembling, and in waiting patiently till the conclusion of the exercises. Acting in this spirit, we show that we honour the institutions of religion; and the example thus exhibited is fitted to impress upon brethren the value of social

¹ *Guide to Private Social Worship*, p. 47.

² 1 Cor. ix. 24; Phil. iii. 13, 14.

³ Heb. vi. 11.

⁴ Luke iv. 16; Matt. xxvi. 20.

religious intercourse, and to promote their spiritual improvement.

Lastly. An earnest desire to *receive and impart spiritual benefit* through this ordinance should characterize those who attend upon it. Mere waiting on the fellowship meeting, under a conviction that it is a duty required by the Church, may arise from formality, and will be reckoned only a bodily service. The private prayer-meeting, we have seen, is an eminent means of communicating mutual spiritual benefit; and we should have recourse to it, with this as a distinct and paramount object. For the right performance of all religious duties, there is required "preparation of heart," affections in unison, and desires strongly set upon the objects that are sought after and expected. Prayer itself has been appropriately said to be "the offering up of the desires of the heart to God." The connection graciously established between prayer and the reception of the blessing is this, "*He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*" "*What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*"¹ In attending on the fellowship meeting, there are many and very precious objects to be realized. The Redeemer's glory to be advanced, and his presence enjoyed; the interests of his Church to be promoted, spiritual and experimental knowledge to be obtained, communion with God and the saints to be realized, vital godliness increased, and the blessings of true religion to be transmitted to future generations—these are among the important benefits which are wont to be conferred upon the praying assemblies of the faithful, or communicated through their instrumentality. When going to attend these associations, and while engaged in the exercises peculiar to them, we should seek to have spiritual desires in lively exercise. Preparation should be made by meditation, reading the Word and prayer, and especially by duly considering the objects and ends of the meeting for fellowship and united prayer. The desire of the Saviour's promised presence should be predominant in the heart; and the Holy Spirit should be sought, not only to infuse within us a suitable frame of heart, but also to be as the plenteous and refreshing rain upon the assembly of praying ones. We should go to meet with brethren in order to get good to our own souls, and to communicate good to others. In the spirit of Moses, when he invited Hobab his brother-in-law to accompany Israel through the wilder-

¹ Psalm cvii. 9; Mark xi. 24.

ness, we should invite and encourage inquirers: "*Come thou with us and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.*" "*And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee.*"¹ These meetings are designed to be a means of quickening, instruction, Christian progress, and spiritual comfort. Every instance of our attending should minister to our spiritual profiting, and to the promotion of the Redeemer's work in the earth. Every separate visit to the prayer-meeting should be regarded as a precious opportunity, which may not again occur, and which should afterwards be remembered as a season of blessing. Christians called to be "the lights of the world," should let their light shine before others, that they may glorify their Father in heaven. They should "provoke one another to love and good works." Desiring themselves to live for the great end of glorifying God, they should study to do all the good they can by their presence at every prayer-meeting, while they expect for themselves spiritual blessing from God's own institution, and loving intercourse with his people. The Divine promises are all encouraging, "*The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.*" "*I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.*"²

¹ Numbers x. 29, 32.

² Isaiah iv. 5; Ezekiel xxxiv. 26.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

HAVING exhibited the *nature, obligations, and advantages* of private social prayer, and given *rules and directions* for fellowship meetings, the question naturally arises, What shall be the result of these instructions? Will it be only to admit the principles which have been discussed, and continue to neglect their application? Or will it be to seek to reduce them immediately to practice, and thus to aim at a thorough revival throughout the Church?

There are CONSIDERATIONS of the most solemn and weighty kind, which should lead us to adopt the latter alternative; there are peculiar ENCOURAGEMENTS at the present time, which should excite and animate the friends of Christ to meet often together for prayer and spiritual converse, and to labour diligently for the extension and efficiency of such associations. These considerations and encouragements have been partly referred to already; notwithstanding, it may tend to deepen the sense of the obligation of the duty, to present them distinctly in the conclusion.

First of all. The AUTHORITY OF CHRIST, the King and Head of the Church, should be of paramount weight, in urging to the observance of the fellowship meeting.

The Redeemer certainly instituted this ordinance, and enjoined its observance upon his disciples in all succeeding ages. He has connected the promise of his gracious presence with attendance upon it. He has placed the mark of his gracious approval upon those who associate together for spiritual intercourse, and who thus speak often one to another; and special benefits in grace and providence, He has ever shown himself willing to confer upon the assemblies of his people, in answer to their united prayers. The law of nature itself dictates such reunions. But with the Christian the will of Christ revealed in his Word, enjoining mutual duties upon all the members of the household of faith, which can only be adequately performed by associating

for familiar spiritual intercourse and social prayer, possesses intrinsic authority and obligation of the highest kind. How can we be genuine disciples of the Redeemer if we do not submit to his authority in all things? How can we love and obey Him, as our Master, if we do not honour Him by a diligent attendance upon all prescribed institutions? By special gracious commands, He has enjoined the ordinance of fellowship; and by many bright and encouraging tokens, He has shown the most tender interest in those who delight in it. The duties connected with this institution honour the Saviour, and singularly tend to recommend and advance true religion. To neglect them is to violate the plain and reiterated commands of Christ, to contemn his favour, and to disregard the claims of pure and undefiled religion. On the other hand, the due observance of this important ordinance discovers a lively concern for the Saviour's honour, and constitutes a test and evidence of loving obedience to his authority. On due consideration, Christians must surely feel that it is highly criminal to neglect such an institution. Observing it, in the spirit of cordial love and obedience, they cannot but experience, that in keeping the Saviour's commandments "there is a great reward;" they reap the fulfilment of his gracious assurance, "*Where I am, there shall my servant be.*"

Secondly. Our own INTEREST, HAPPINESS, and USEFULNESS are intimately connected with attendance upon the ordinance of Christian fellowship. The Lord consults their best interests by calling his people to his service. Godliness is certainly profitable for all things. Wisdom's "ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Much spiritual profit is derived from meeting with brethren,—fellow-travellers to Mount Zion, the joint partakers of a common hope of salvation. The reading of the Sacred Oracles together, and familiar expositions of Holy Scripture; the communication of believing experiences, friendly counsels, sympathies expressed in trials, exhortation, reproof, and direction given, and the exercises of devotion engaged in by assembled disciples—all these are calculated to minister important benefits, and to sustain in trial. The followers of Christ are exposed to the benumbing influence of worldly things, and of association with worldly men. To maintain the spirit and vigour of piety, we must love retirement, and improve it by spiritual exercises. The social principle, a part of our constitution, is refined and elevated in fraternal intercourse; it is directed to its noblest ends when it is dis-

played in connection with acts of religious worship. This is, at the same time, a source of profit and of the purest enjoyment. The pleasures of religion are enhanced by being shared with fellow-saints. The joys of sacred friendship are pure and elevated, and the sympathies which circulate among the members of Christ's mystical body are tender and most enlivening. If we would personally reap abundant spiritual profit, and experience the hallowed pleasures of religion, we should have frequent recourse to the fellowship meeting.

As a preparation for eminent usefulness, the ordinance of social prayer is invaluable. It forms an excellent training school for workmen for the Redeemer's service. Spiritual sensibilities are here awakened. The wants and miseries of perishing men are more clearly seen. Motives the most powerful and pressing are presented for Christian exertion, while united prayer in behalf of the Church and the world propels to self-dedication and devotedness. Thus, whether for our spiritual profit or comfort or usefulness, the social prayer-meeting will be found most invaluable; and for the attainment of these objects it should be regarded by us of special interest and importance.

Thirdly. SPECIAL PRIVILEGES enjoyed, and BRIGHT EXAMPLES set before us, should urge to the diligent observance of social prayer. The possession of the Word of God, access to public ordinances, the blessed hopes of the Gospel, lay those who enjoy them under manifold obligations of gratitude to associate together for prayer and praise, and other religious exercises. All our religious privileges are designed to have the effect of drawing us more closely to fellow-Christians, and of leading us to take delight in the communion of saints. The annals of the Church have always shown that in seasons of eminent privilege and blessing, the faithful have had recourse to private social prayer, as a suitable means of expressing their devout gratitude and joy—of manifesting love to the brethren, of calling down a more abundant blessing upon the Church, and of advancing the Redeemer's glory in the earth. Prayer-meetings, we have already said, have been remarkably owned as an instrument of revival in the Church, and have been also the precious fruit of visitations of the Spirit. A great "*cloud of witnesses*" surrounds us, in attesting the value and excellence of this institution. In times of persecution and trial, the faithful have been strengthened and refreshed by spiritual intercourse with fellow-sufferers, by converse on the Word of

God, and by united praise and prayer. Here has the great Shepherd made his flocks to feed, and to rest at noon, ministering to them provision and protection from the rage of the oppressor. These associations were, in early times, and have been in many lands, the nurseries of the Church, as well as the retreats to which fervent piety has retired in periods of declension and apostasy. The union of a few godly persons for mutual counsel and united prayer has, not unfrequently become the germ of flourishing churches, as such associations seem yet destined to contribute, in an eminent degree, to the revival of true religion in Christian lands, and to the world's conversion. In view of the extensive irreligion and ungodliness of the masses in neighbourhoods where the light of the Gospel shines, and the acknowledged lack of faithful labourers for the spiritual harvest, whether at home or abroad, might not Christians have recourse to united prayer with the happiest effects? Thus would their own hearts be duly impressed with the great concerns of the Saviour's glory, and with the magnitude of the work to which the Church is called, for the salvation of perishing sinners. Thus would a fit instrumentality be prepared, and impelled to go forth and labour in the Redeemer's vineyard, and in answer to united and persevering prayer an abundant blessing would descend upon the work of the labourers. Ample testimony has been borne by the Church that, in past eras of trial and enlargement, the fellowship meeting has subserved the most valuable purposes. Why should we doubt that its influence for good shall be felt yet more powerful and extensive in approaching periods of conflict and blessing? The recorded experience of many distinguished believers, both in life and death, has attested the benefit and refreshment that have been derived from association with brethren in the prayer-meeting. The communion of saints thus realized has proved one of the most powerful supports in the wilderness, as well as one of the most pleasing sources of grateful remembrance and praise, when its wanderings and trials have approached to their termination. Saints not a few from dying beds and scaffolds, have spoken with evident interest and joy of intercourse with believing brethren in "*sweet societies*."

This ordinance, too, has furnished to the eye of faith and hope one of the liveliest prospects of the glory to be revealed. The fellowship of saints will be renewed in heaven, and will there be realized in a more elevated and endearing manner than

could possibly be known on earth. Amidst mutual recognitions in the Father's house, and in the full view of the Saviour's glory, the saints made perfect will rejoice together in the fruition of their loftiest aspirations. Conflicts will then, it is true, be crowned with victory; mutual sympathy and support in sorrow and suffering are no longer required. Prayers are merged into joyful and uninterrupted praises; and ordinances suited to the wilderness state are not needed in glory. In the splendour of the Redeemer's presence and glory, there is "no temple" and "no night," and the saints need not "the sun," nor "candle," nor any subsidiary light. They have come to Zion with "everlasting joy upon their heads," and "sorrow and sighing" have fled for ever away. But though retired, social prayer will find no place in heaven; that which was the essence of the fellowship meeting on earth—complacential love of the brethren, and the intercourse of hearts knit together in affection—will exist and enhance the joys of the upper sanctuary. "*The redeemed walk there.*" All the scriptural representations of the celestial state exhibit the saints in glory as gathered together, united in holy and indissoluble fellowship, their pleasures unalloyed and enduring, and enlivened by the vivid remembrance of the conflicts which they shared in common on their way to the heavenly inheritance. Are not such considerations fitted to deepen in thoughtful minds the sense of the value of Christian fellowship? Should they not lead the servants of God everywhere more and more to desire access to an ordinance so precious?¹

Fourthly. THE CHARACTER OF THE TIMES that are passing

¹ There are some sections of the Redeemer's Church that are under peculiar obligations to remember with devout gratitude the institution of the prayer-meeting, and to maintain it efficiently. In the early periods of their history, they existed and grew chiefly in societies for united prayer and edification. In the want of public ordinances, this was their chief means of spiritual fellowship. When they afterwards obtained a stated ministry, owing to the paucity of labourers, and the limited supply of public ministrations, societies for united prayer were still the nurseries of the Church. Thus were the young instructed, the members advanced in mutual confidence, in religious knowledge, and in spiritual gifts and graces; and by the accession of others, the Church was increased and extended. The public ministrations of the Word that were occasionally enjoyed were thus improved to the utmost; and brethren meeting for mutual consultation and encouragement, and engaging in the solemn exercises of devotion, were animated to self-denying exertions for advancing the cause of Christ. Thus did the religious awakening in Wales in the early part of the last century extend, and the Welsh Calvinistic body spread through the principality, and increased in numbers and in the fruits of genuine piety. By means of the "Societies" for united prayer, the labours of Whitefield and Wesley in

over the Church, and of those that are approaching, supplies powerful and constraining motives to the friends of truth to abound in the duties of Christian fellowship. The aspects of Providence are at present solemn and striking, betokening trial and blessing to the Church, and ominous of judgments to the nations. Vengeance is impending over wicked systems and their supporters. The fierce conflict of nations approaches. The downfall of mystical Babylon is at hand. The symbolical heavens and earth are shaken to their *translation*.¹ In times of confusion and distress of nations, it is specially required that the fearers of the Lord should speak often one to another. The "chambers" into which they are invited to enter till "the indignation be overpast," are not for solitary retreat and refuge, but for united counsel and prayer, and for waiting for the expected issue. In the way of God's judgments, the saints wait for Him, and the desire of their soul is toward Him and the remembrance of his name.² The fervent and united prayers of the faithful have an immediate connection with the effusion of Divine judgments upon guilty nations. The "two anointed ones" have power as often as they will to "shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy," and to "smite the earth with all plagues."³ The Church under long oppression unites with the souls under the altar in invoking vengeance on them that dwell on the antichristian earth. When the final destruction of mystical Babylon comes, it is represented as the answer to the many importunate prayers of the faithful in different ages and countries. The united prayers of God's people are required to give direction to the course of Divine judgments, to limit their range and operation, and that they may accomplish God's gracious pur-

these countries and America were followed by the reclaiming of multitudes, and the organization of numerous churches. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, Ireland, and America is eminently indebted to the ordinance of fellowship meetings for her increase, purity of doctrine and worship, and the piety and steadfastness of her members. The descendants of the fathers and founders of these sections of the Church should cleave with peculiar veneration and affection to an institution which has been to them so signal a means of blessing; and should seek, by maintaining it in vigour and efficiency, to enjoy through this ordinance enlarged increase and blessing.

¹ Haggai ii. 7; Hebrews xii. 27—*την μετάθεσιν*. The original word properly signifies *translation*, not removal, and refers to the change that shall take place in worldly kingdoms, when they shall become "*the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*."

² Isaiah xxvi. 8, 20.

³ Revelation xi. 6.

poses to the Church and the world. In perilous times the ordinance of Christian fellowship will prove a means of safety—a shelter and defence from danger. Those who keep the word of the Saviour's "patience," are kept from "the hour of temptation" that comes "upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth." In answer to believing prayer, the Church will be preserved amidst outward storms and commotions; and judgments will be sanctified for awakening sinners, and blessed for removing obstacles to the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth.

The Church, at the present eventful period, greatly needs *revival*; and this is to be earnestly sought in united and persevering prayer. Christians have a loud and distinct call to associate together for this purpose. Ministers and people equally require awakening. Even with an orthodox profession, and an increase of evangelical preaching and effort, there is observable a lamentable want of *spirituality*, and the duties of practical godliness are neglected. There are manifold dangers to the Church from the world—there are evils *within* which hinder progress, and give enemies an advantage. There is danger that the excitement and activity of the present day in religious matters may take a wrong direction and be productive of evil. The enemy comes in like a flood. The powers of darkness may be expected to be aroused to redoubled efforts as the light is spreading, and their empire is in danger. Before the Church is a great work. The sunken masses throughout Christian lands are to be reclaimed; the reproach of mere nominal Christianity to be removed from the Church; and the followers of Christ are to be raised to their proper position in the manifestation of a holy character. The Spirit, the grand promise of the last times, is absolutely needed to effect these mighty changes. Through his agency alone, the Word goes forth with power: the Church is enlightened, purified, and blessed; and Christians shine forth, awakened from the sleep of death, in "the beauties of holiness," like dew from the womb of the morning. The last powerful effusion of the Spirit, by which "the dry bones" will be quickened, and "the wilderness become a fruitful field," is promised as the fruit of importunate and persevering prayer. In view of the Church's present low condition, and of her urgent wants, should not Christians everywhere associate together for prayer and combined effort? For Zion's sake the faithful should not keep silence day nor night, and should give

the Lord no rest till her "righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth."

The want of a devoted *instrumentality* for the Church's work and the world's conversion, should give intensity to the call to united prayer and spiritual converse. If the blessed era predicted and promised is to come, and the mighty changes spoken of are to be effected, multitudes of prepared instruments are required. The means of religious instruction must be greatly increased,—Bibles and missionaries sent forth in numbers vastly surpassing all that the Church has yet attempted. The offerings of Christian liberality require to be increased a thousandfold. The fallow ground must be everywhere broken up; and the good seed of the kingdom must be sown to an extent in some measure commensurate to the harvest. Nothing can inspire faith to enter aright upon these important labours but the spirit of prayer, nothing else will bring down the rains of heaven upon the seed sown. The world's conversion is the great object of the Church's aspirations and joyful hopes—the high design of her mission in the earth, the fulfilment of her destiny, the crown and consummation of her labours. The great article of the Church's testimony—that for which fathers prayed and laboured, and martyrs died, the Headship of Messiah the Prince—is yet to be fully acknowledged throughout the nations. Towards its ultimate manifestation and glorious triumph, every impediment that now exists must be removed,—all must come into professed and willing subjection to the sceptre of Immanuel. To accomplish this exalted object, supernatural influences and Divine manifestations, both of judgment and mercy, are indispensably required, and these are to be sought in fervent and united prayer.

What *motives*, high and ennobling, have Christians in our day to take counsel together respecting the great concerns of the Church's promised revival and the world's conversion! What glorious objects are before them, and their near attainment is neither doubtful nor uncertain! Encouraged by assured predictions, and animated by bright hopes, they should joyfully reiterate to fellow-Christians the invitation, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight." "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of his

ways, and we will walk in his paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”¹

The blessing large and abundant awaits the cry of united and importunate prayer to precede its bestowal. When the Church is aroused to ask in faith and to give the Lord “no rest,” He will arise and plead his own cause. The Spirit will be poured upon us from on high ; a fit instrumentality will be raised up ; the labours of faithful servants will be crowned with success ; Zion will put on her beautiful garments, and be acknowledged as “the joy of the earth ;” the heathen will be given to the Son for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

Finally. The bright *example* of our blessed Lord, and the gracious *aid* which He guarantees, with the consideration that *our time of privileges is short*, should excite and encourage us in these duties.

If we have the mind of Christ, we must abound in prayer. Would we enjoy his presence and be with Him, we must copy his example. His was throughout a life of prayer. This was its element, support, and solace. Not only did the Saviour delight in prayer when alone, He likewise frequently engaged in it in company with his disciples. After special prayer, and enjoining on them united prayer, He commissioned his apostles ; while He prayed, He was transfigured ; He closed his last instructions to his disciples before He suffered with solemn prayer. He took with Him a select few, and prayed in his agony in the garden. He expired on the cross praying. His ascent to heaven was begun, as with uplifted hands He sought and commanded the blessing upon his disciples ; and He went away to glory, where He “ever liveth to make intercession.” Let us follow this all-perfect example. The grace of the Saviour may be certainly expected in the path of dutiful obedience. His righteousness is sufficient for acceptance. The Holy Spirit, promised to them that ask Him, will enable to obey Divine precepts, and be the unfailing source of holiness and comfort. Our day of privilege and opportunity is hastening to a close. We are commanded not to forsake *the assembling of ourselves*, and so much the more “AS WE SEE THE DAY APPROACHING.” The things of time are transitory and fleeting. Death is near. The judgment-seat and eternity are at hand. Soon will our connection with the fellowship of saints on earth terminate, soon will our opportunities of prayer end for ever.

¹ Hosea vi. 1, 2 ; Isaiah ii. 3.

Oh ! how precious do the seasons of hallowed intercourse with believers appear, as they approach to a close ! The record concerning the royal psalmist, when his public work was done, is, "*The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.*" Like him, our work and life should end with prayer. The transition will be joyful beyond expression, to pass from the fellowship of saints on earth to the company and employments of the ransomed in glory. There all that was desired and hoped for will be fully realized. There praise will be ennobling and perpetual ; and the Lamb, standing in the midst of "the four-and-twenty elders," will be the centre of all hearts,—the object of enraptured wonder and adoration for evermore.

A P P E N D I X.

I.—SUBJECTS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION IN FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS.

THE subjects of spiritual converse in the social prayer-meeting should be such as tend to mutual edification and practical godliness. As a specimen of the questions that may be suitably proposed from passages of Scripture, we subjoin a few, chiefly from those which are given in the *Short Directory for Religious Societies*; and from a useful little work, published in 1757, entitled, *An Attempt towards the Improvement of Religious Fellowship*, by a "Well-wisher to Religion."

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry."—Psalm ii. 12.

Q. How are we to kiss the Son of God, so as to escape his anger?

"Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine abound."—Psalm iv. 7.

Q. What are the singular excellencies of that joy and gladness which arise from the light of God's countenance, above all earthly joys?

"To behold the beauty of the Lord," &c.—Psalm xxvii. 4.

Q. What is the beauty of the Lord, which his saints behold and admire in his house?

"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house."—Psalm lxxxiv. 4.

Q. 1. What special blessings are conferred in holy ordinances?

2. How may we know if we are blessed therein?

"I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me."
—Psalm cxix. 19.

Q. How do the children of God live as strangers on earth; and what argument does this furnish for Divine teaching?

"And taketh hold of my covenant."—Isaiah lvi. 6.

Q. What is God's covenant of which we are to take hold; and how do we take hold of it?

"He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away."—Luke i. 53.

Q. 1. Who are the hungry whom the Lord fills, and the rich whom He sends away empty?

2. What is the goodness with which He satisfies the hungry?

"And we beheld his glory."—John i. 14.

Q. What is the glory which faith discovers in the Lord Jesus?

The religious questions proposed in the fellowship meeting should be stated in simple and perspicuous-terms, and should be such as naturally to furnish important instruction, and subject-matter for united prayer. From the specimen given, the attentive reader of the Scriptures will be at no loss to propose such questions as the circumstances of the society, or the condition of the members may seem to require.

In the *Attempt towards the Improvement of Fellowship Meetings* the answers are given; and are generally expressed in a manner befitting the capacity of the members of the private social meeting, and so as to promote spirituality and godly practice. Though some of the answers are rather lengthened for an extract, we subjoin a few, chiefly because of the plain but valuable instructions which they contain. The expressions are, in some instances, rather quaint and familiar, but we give them with slight alteration, as adapted to the tone of thought and feeling of those who delight in spiritual converse.

QUESTION I.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another."—Malachi iii. 16.

What are the duties incumbent upon fellow-members of the same religious society?

1. Those who have recently become members should examine carefully, as in God's sight, whether they were moved to make such fellowship from ostentation, or the desire of worldly gain, or an empty profession of religion—or from love to God, gratitude to Him, and the desire to do his will—that their own souls might be benefited, and that they might be useful to others.

2. It is their duty to study in all things to be exemplary in the world, as the eyes of others that know they are members will be fixed upon them. and as experience teaches us that example frequently goes farther than precept. For this purpose, they should be diligent in the use of all scriptural means for mortifying indwelling sin, and for strengthening habits of grace.

3. They should conscientiously and punctually attend the meetings with brethren, and not forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is.

4. It is their duty to study to improve the time spent in society to the glory of God; and to communicate their gifts and graces to one another, for the mutual benefit of all the members.

5. They should maintain the communion of saints in the bond of love without hatred or malice, and the bond of peace without variance or divisions; they should therefore avoid such questions or subjects of conversation as are unprofitable, and have a tendency to raise or carry on strife or debate.

6. It is their duty to rejoice in each other's gifts and graces, and to be thankful to God for them. They should aim to support the weak, comfort the feeble-minded, be patient toward one another, and to bear with each other's infirmities, covering them in love.

7. If any member be overtaken with a fault, it is their duty to restore such in the spirit of meekness, considering themselves lest they be tempted.

8. It is their duty when there is need for reproof, to administer it in meekness and love. When they themselves are reprov'd by any of the brethren, they should take it in good part, accounting it as among the greatest instances

of kindness for Christians to acquaint one another with what they observe to be amiss in their principles and conduct, and to reprove them for it.

9. It is their special duty to pray often one for the other, and particularly to plead that their meetings may be blessed for honouring God, the advancement of the members in holiness, and their attainment of meetness for a higher fellowship with God and the saints in heaven.

QUESTION II.

'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, &c.—2 Corinthians xiii. 5.

What are some of the distinguishing evidences, whereby we may know whether we are true believers or hypocrites?

1. The believer, on coming to Christ, renounces all his own righteousness, and sensible of his unworthiness and vileness, accepts of Christ, not only as a Priest to save him, but also as a Prophet to teach him, and as a King to rule over him; but the hypocrite is never truly sensible of his own unworthiness, vileness, and want of all good, and so never heartily accepts of Christ in all his offices.

2. The believer loves God not only on account of his benefits, but also because of his loveliness in Himself or of his intrinsic excellency; but the hypocrite loves God only on account of what he receives from Him, or rather, he loves what he receives from God better than God himself.

3. The believer loves God though He frown upon him, humble him, and chastise him, and is desirous to have God glorified, though he should be despised, reproached, and persecuted; but the hypocrite cannot love God in the want of outward encouragements, and in the face of discouragements—his chief desire is to have the praise of men, and thus to rob God of his glory.

4. The believer serves God chiefly out of love to Him, and gratitude for redeeming grace. Through love to God, he perseveres in his service, though he be long without receiving comfort or sensible advantage from it; but the hypocrite serves God chiefly with a view to reward from God or man. He becomes unwilling to continue in the service, if he is any length of time without receiving comfort, or sensible of supposed advantage from it.

5. The believer loves the saints because of the image of God upon them, and because they study to please God; but the hypocrite loves them because of some qualities which please him, or for his own advantage.

6. The believer hates sin, not only as it brings misery on the creature, but also as it dishonours and offends a pure and infinitely holy God—he not only studies rightly to perform public, social, and relative duties, but also secret and heart duties—he not only studies to abstain from open transgressions, but also from sins which no man sees, and from heart sins, and he studies to mortify sin in the first motions of it in his heart; but the hypocrite knows nothing of this, seeking only the applause of men and his own happiness, and living unconcerned about the glory of God.

QUESTION III.

"He that hath the Son hath life."—1 John v. 12.

What life have they that have the Son?

1. They have a right in and through Christ to the temporal life which they enjoy.

2. They have a principle of spiritual life implanted in their souls by the Holy Spirit.
3. They have spiritual life treasured up in Christ their glorious Head.
4. They have a right and title through Christ to eternal life.

QUESTION IV.

"Quench not the Spirit."—1 Thessalonians v. 19.

How are professors guilty of quenching the Spirit?

1. By doing the works of the flesh.
2. By giving themselves to excessive worldly business or diversions when under convictions.
3. By refusing to yield to his motives exciting to the performance of religious duties.
4. By neglecting the performance of solemn vows and resolutions.
5. By not using the means prescribed by the Spirit for the increase of grace—such as reading and hearing the Word, Christian conference, meditation and prayer.
6. By neglecting to stir up into lively exercises the graces of faith, hope, repentance, zeal.
7. By leaving off soon religious exercises, where the motions of the Spirit are enjoyed.

QUESTION V.

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind."—Ephesians iv. 23.

What are the evidences of this renewal of the spirit of our mind? They are such as these—

1. Being dissatisfied with the things of the world for a portion, and choosing the Lord for our sure portion, giving Him the chief place in our hearts.
2. When Christ is truly precious to us in his person, offices, and his relations to his people.
3. Love to the people of God, chiefly because they are his—because they are like Him and study to please Him.
4. When the degrees of our love to the saints are according as they appear to resemble Christ, and live to his glory.
5. If we hate sin chiefly because it dishonours God, crucifies Christ, grieves the Holy Spirit, and defiles the precious and immortal soul.
6. When we are grieved from the heart for our own sins, even though we confide that their guilt and punishment are removed through Christ.
7. If we mourn not only for our own sins, but likewise for the sins of others; and that principally because God is dishonoured, and men's souls are polluted and ruined.
8. An earnest desire not only to be kept from sinning against God in our lives, but also an intense longing after purity of heart, habitual self-loathing, and vigorous endeavours to mortify sin in our members.

QUESTION VI.

"If any men serve me, let him follow me."—John xii. 26.

How must we follow Christ, if we would serve Him acceptably?

1. We must follow his example by imitating it.

2. We must follow his precepts by obeying them.
3. We must follow the motions of his Spirit by yielding to them.
4. We must follow his presence when withdrawing, by being instant in prayer for his return.

QUESTION VII.

"Thy Maker is thy Husband."—Isaiah liv. 5.

What are the characteristics of those who have the Lord Jesus Christ for their Husband?

1. They have given their consent to the terms of the marriage-covenant, and are willing to be subject to Christ, and to be ruled by Him.
2. They love Him with a most affectionate and supreme love.
3. They have high and honourable thoughts of Him.
4. They are frequently meditating on the things that are above, where Christ is.
5. They have on the wedding-robe of his righteousness, and are adorned with the graces of his Spirit.
6. They are obedient to his will.
7. They delight in those that do his will, as the friends of their Husband.
8. They have a tender concern for his interest in the world.
9. They earnestly desire and delight in the tokens of his love.
10. They love his house, and seek to be in the place where his name is praised, and his honour dwells.
11. They endeavour after habitual preparation for his coming to receive them home to Himself, to dwell with Him throughout eternity.

QUESTION VIII.

"My people are bent to backsliding from me."—Hosea xi. 7.

What are the signs of backsliding from God? They are such as these—

1. Beginning to dally with temptation, and deliberating with ourselves about committing iniquity.
2. Not discerning the evil of sin as formerly—being less careful to abstain from every appearance of evil than we were before.
3. The want of a relish for spiritual things which we once possessed.
4. The absence of such earnest desires after communion with God in religious ordinances, as we had in former times.
5. Slothfulness in not pressing forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

QUESTION IX.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death."—P'salm xlviii. 14.

What are distinctive marks of those who may safely conclude that God is their God for ever and ever, and will be their Guide even unto death?

1. They have chosen God for their Portion, Christ for their Saviour, the Holy Spirit for their Guide, the Word of God for their rule, the children of God for their companions, Divine ordinances as waiting-places on the King of Zion, the way of holiness for their walk in the world, and heaven as their blissful rest at the end of their journey.

2. They have full satisfaction in God as their Portion, improve C their Saviour, comply with the motions of the Spirit, observe an the directions of the Word, delight in the society of the saints, f the ordinances as the means of communion with God, live a life of h and labour to act as becomes the expectants of the heavenly inherita

II.—CORRESPONDENCE AMONG FELLOWSHIP MEET

It was stated in the "General Directions" for the managen fellowship meetings, that it is desirable that the different societie congregation should occasionally correspond with one another, by th change of delegates. It has been often found highly profitable to ha a plan of correspondence arranged that all the fellowship meetin congregation may, annually, or every half-year, exchange visits, t with the other; and, in some instances, general meetings of delegat all the societies meet once a quarter, or half-yearly, to cultivate f intercourse, inquire after the state of religion in the various fellowshi ings, to transact other congregational business, and to take mutual respecting the advancement of religion.

The following is a specimen of such a method of corresponde adopted by the Reformed Presbyterian Congregation of Paisley, present year :—

"TABLE OF VISITATION FOR FELLOWSHIP SOCIETIES, *from 7* 1855 to January 1856, agreed upon at the Meeting of Delegates

	Society No. 1 to visit No.	Society No. 2 to visit No.	Society No. 3 to visit No.	Society No. 4 to visit No.	Society No. 5 to visit No.	Society No. 6 to visit No.	Society No. 7 to visit No.
<i>January, .</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>February, .</i>	3	4	5	6	7	8	1
<i>March, .</i>	4	5	6	7	8	1	2
<i>April, . .</i>	5	6	7	8	1	2	3
<i>May, . .</i>	6	7	8	1	2	3	4
<i>June, . .</i>	7	8	1	2	3	4	5
<i>July, . .</i>	8	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>August, .</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>September, .</i>	3	4	5	6	7	8	1
<i>October, .</i>	4	5	6	7	8	1	2
<i>November, .</i>	5	6	7	8	1	2	3
<i>December, .</i>	6	7	8	1	2	3	4

"It is requested that the visitations be made on as *early an eve* the month as possible, and that the societies in the country be visited the summer months."

The delegates, consisting of two representatives from each society, meet annually, to receive the reports of visitation during the year, and to settle the order of visits for the ensuing year. At the close of the printed form are given hints for conducting the societies, which, as embodying, in a condensed form, some of the most important directions which we have already given, we subjoin.

"A few useful hints for the better conducting of our Fellowship Meetings, carefully selected, and approved of by the Meeting of Delegates, held 24th November 1854 :—

"The members of these societies must be in the full fellowship of the Church ; but persons of decent Christian character, who wish to correspond with the members of the Church, may be admitted as hearers. The children of members ought to attend, and receive special attention.

"The members meet in terms of proper equality, and are to conduct the exercises by rotation. The person who opens the meeting is president for the evening.

"In conducting all the parts of the social exercises, regard must be paid to *time* and *proportion*. The passage selected should be intimated on the preceding evening.

"The remarks made on the question should be brief and pertinent ; observations already made should not be repeated by others. Individuals ought not, by tedious discourse, to occupy the time of others. Female members or young persons might select and read parallel passages of Scripture to that under consideration.

"In conducting the business of the society, attention should be paid to the Christian spirit in which all things are to be done. Members must study to conduct themselves in humility and love, and not to indulge in remarks that indicate a slighting of others.

"Regard must be paid to punctuality and regular attendance. The services should commence at the hour, there being two or three present ; the member present first on the roll opening the meeting.

"Subjects should be selected to promote godly edifying, and taken up in pleasing variety and rotation—the doctrines of the cross, the privileges of the covenant of grace, the holy duties of Christianity, &c. And it is the duty of members to ponder the subject by themselves, that they may be able to speak to the edification of others, and be prepared to hear, to discriminate, and to receive the remarks of other members."

III.—QUERIES SUITABLE TO BE PROPOSED AT CORRESPONDING SOCIETIES, AND TO COMMISSIONERS AT GENERAL MEETINGS.

As the intercourse of fellowship meetings, by the correspondence of delegates, should be improved to the utmost for the revival of religion and exciting one another to all holy living, it has been found useful to have a summary of Queries prepared for the delegates, as a directory in inquiring after the state of religion in the societies which they visit, and likewise for the commissioners from the different fellowship meetings that convene in a general meeting. The following is a specimen of such questions as have been put in some congregations, upon such occasions, with the happiest effect. They are not given as designed to be the only questions which should be proposed at the corresponding meetings, but as suggesting the subjects of

inquiry, and supplying hints in relation to the great matters which should engage the prayerful attention of brethren in their intercourse with each other :—

QUERIES, &c.

“ 1. Do you conscientiously and diligently attend upon the public ministrations of the house of God—the Word preached, and sacraments and discipline administered, being careful to be present before public worship begins, and to remain till the congregation is dismissed by the minister ; preparing for such exercises by prayer and meditation, and endeavouring, while engaged in them, to mix faith with the hearing of the Word, and to recognize the presence and authority of Christ in his ordinances ?

“ 2. Are you careful to give punctual attendance upon the meetings of the fellowship society, studying to regulate your affairs so as neither to absent yourself, nor to curtail the time devoted to the exercise ? If the head of a family, do you endeavour to bring your children and domestics with you to public worship and social meetings ? When in the society, are you careful to obtain reasons of absence from members, and to judge of them in the spirit of faithfulness and meekness, and to reprove and admonish so that you may in no wise suffer sin on your brother ? Do you dutifully, and as in the sight of the Searcher of hearts, declare to the society your reasons of absence when at any time you are prevented from attending ? Do you affectionately and readily render account to your brethren of aught in your conduct that may be matter of inquiry, and receive in the spirit of meekness their reproof ; and do you study to lay yourself out in your deportment in society, so that you may provoke others to love and good works, and that your intercourse with the brethren may tend to mutual edification ?

“ 3. In the family of which you are a member, are you careful to maintain the worship of God regularly at all seasons, morning and evening, and at such a time that your domestics can all attend ? If the male head, do you not only observe it yourself, but require also the attendance upon it of all your household, as well servants as children ? If the female, do you perform the duty yourself, when your husband is absent or unable to conduct it, or when you may be in a solitary condition ? If a child or a servant, are you conscientiously endeavouring to be at no time allowedly absent from family worship ? Do you see that the Sabbath be duly sanctified, preparation being made for it before its coming, and your household abstaining from all unnecessary bodily labour, avoiding visiting yourself and discountenancing visits by your children or domestics, and preventing all vain recreations or conversation in your family ? And are you careful diligently to catechise and instruct your household at least every Sabbath evening ?

“ 4. Can you truly affirm, as in the sight of the Lord that liveth and seeth you, that you give yourself to reading the Word daily, to meditation, self-examination, and secret prayer ; that you do attend to secret prayer at least every morning and evening ; and that, in performing it, you join watchfulness with prayer, and seek retirement for the duty, not resting satisfied, as the manner of some is, with only a few serious thoughts on the bed in lying down and rising up ?

“ 5. Do you in your walk and conversation study to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man ; avoiding every appearance of evil, and giving no offence to Jew or Gentile, that the Gospel be not blamed ? For this purpose, are you endeavouring to cherish the feelings of warm and affectionate brotherhood towards the members of the Church, remembering their cases, in your applications to the throne of grace, and so acting

towards them that you may be said to "*weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice*," and to bear each other's burdens, fulfilling the law of Christ? In your intercourse with mankind, are you studying to live in a state of holy separation from the world, and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but to reprove them? In your dealings, are you careful to provide things honest in the sight of all men; observing strict punctuality in your engagements, taking care to enter into no speculations that may endanger your own character and that of the Church, and conscientiously paying your just debts according to your ability? Do you study to do to others as you would that they in similar circumstances should do to you? And in your whole deportment, can you truly say, that you set the Lord before you, dreading his holy indignation before the fear of man, and seeking continually his gracious approbation, more than the favour or friendship of the world?

"6. Are you constantly endeavouring to maintain a holy reverence for God's great name, by avoiding all rash or irreverent mention of it in the way of blessing yourself or others when taken by surprise; all rash or sworn oaths; every abuse of the lot, as in games of chance, &c.; and all abusing of the creatures of God? And do you, on every proper occasion, reprove, instruct, and warn others who may offend in any of these ways?

"7. Do you conscientiously, according to your ability, contribute to the support of the Gospel? Do you cheerfully and liberally dedicate a portion of your substance for the advancement of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth? And are you faithfully endeavouring to consider the case of the poor, and to contribute for their relief according to the Divine rule recorded, Cor. xvi. 2?

"8. On special occasions, when the circumstances of the Church, or your families, or your own souls, appear to require it, are you careful to observe a day of personal or family fasting or thanksgiving—and do you endeavour to stir up others of your brethren to the same duties?

"9. Finally, in your family, and as a member of the society and congregation, are you careful to watch against everything in your temper, words, and conduct, that might tend to wound the conscience of the weakest brother, or that might weaken brotherly affection? And, as far as in you lies, do you labour to prevent strife among brethren, to heal divisions, and to bring the assemblies of Zion to such a state of peace and concord, as will evince that the God of love and peace continually dwells there?"

QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSIONERS.

"1. Have you good reason to believe that all the members of the society which you represent are living in the performance of the personal and relative duties to which they are pledged by their solemn covenanted profession?

"2. Is the attendance of your members upon the public and social ordinances satisfactory? If there are exceptions, state them to the meeting, with the steps which have been taken to ensure greater punctuality?

"3. In respect of the number of members, is your society on the increase or decrease; mention, if possible, the exact number by which it has increased or diminished since the last general meeting, with the *causes* which have led to the alteration?

"4. What is the state of your correspondence with other societies of the congregation?

"5. If any of your members are declining in their profession, refractory against the discipline of the Church, or unwilling to contribute regularly,

according to their ability, for the support of the Gospel, what steps have been taken by the society to reclaim them? If these have proved unavailing, have they withdrawn from brethren that walk thus disorderly?

"6. Does your society employ any means for *spreading the knowledge of the truth* throughout the neighbourhood in which its members are scattered, and to increase its numbers? If so, state what means are employed, and the result?

"7. Have you any evidence of the growth of vital godliness among the members of your society, or of the ordinances being blessed to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace?"

IV.—FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS A MEANS OF THEOLOGICAL INSTRUCTION—DR M'LEOD.

In the Memoir of the late Dr M'Leod of New York, an instance is related of the salutary influence of societies for united prayer, in imparting solid and extensive views of theology, and in preparing for eminent usefulness.

Dr M'Leod was son of a minister of the Established Church of Scotland, whose parish was located in the Highlands, and who is mentioned with high commendation by Dr Johnson, in his *Tour to the Hebrides*. His father dying while he was a boy, Dr M'Leod emigrated to the United States in 1792, while he was yet scarcely eighteen years of age. Soon after his arrival, he proceeded to the townships of Princeton and Duanesburgh, a few miles from Albany. Here he found a number of families who had some time before emigrated from the Highlands of Scotland. These were distinguished for simple and unostentatious piety; and the youthful M'Leod being attracted towards them from love to his countrymen and congeniality of spirit, became a favourite with them, and cultivated with them an intercourse which was spiritual and mutually profitable.

At the time he became acquainted with this people, he had become dissatisfied with the Erastian subjection of Established Churches to the State, and with the law of patronage, and he began to inquire earnestly after that ecclesiastical system which was most accordant with the "law and the testimony." By a singular coincidence, the Highlanders about the same time were engaged in a similar process of inquiry after religious truth. With much diligence and prayer, they employed scriptural means to enable them to ascertain the path of duty. In conjunction with Mr M'Leod, they constituted themselves into societies for prayer and Christian conference. Having procured the testimonies of such churches as they considered approximating nearest to the requirements of the Word of God, they read, compared, and discussed the doctrines contained in them, praying for Divine light and direction; the result was that, in process of time, they finally adopted the testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Seldom, indeed, has any people more intelligently and cordially embraced the articles of their religious creed than did these societies on the banks of the Mohawk river, with which Mr M'Leod had connected himself. In subsequent life, when he had taken his place among the most distinguished in America for theological acquirements, the question was asked him, "*Where did you study theology?*" "In the Societies," was the answer. Not a few of the devoted ministers of Christ, in various lands, have been indebted to the same scriptural institution for the most valuable of their theological attainments.

V.—CONCERTS FOR UNITED PRAYER.

We have noticed the method of *Concerts for Prayer*, as embracing in it much of the distinguished excellencies of the fellowship meeting, and as possessing not a few of its special advantages. In America, those who take an interest in the work of Foreign Missions have been accustomed, from an early period, to observe a monthly *Concert of Prayer*, in behalf of missionaries labouring among the heathen, and for the evangelization of the world. The *Missionary Herald*, and other organs of missionary intelligence, make frequent mention of the blessed effects flowing from these united supplications of the Lord's "remembrancers." Sometimes the labourers in distant fields have obtained renewed strength in trial and difficulty, at the time that prayer was offered up in their behalf, and sometimes they have, by the same means, had remarkable encouragement and success in their work.

During late years, it has been usual for some devoted persons, about the end or commencement of the year, to issue a call for a "Concert of United Prayer," to be observed for a period of eight or ten days, and to publish at the same time a summary of reasons for the observance of the appointment, or of subjects of special prayer. Such calls have been willingly responded to by a large number of Christians of different names, and in various countries, and we have reason to believe that the effects have been eminently beneficial to the Church. It seems to us deserving of consideration whether such proposals for united prayer might not be carried out to great advantage by gathering together, during the time of the concert, those who earnestly desire the revival of true religion and the advancement of Christ's kingdom, in fellowship meetings, as well as engaging them in private prayer, at certain agreed hours of the day.

The meetings of the EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE may be regarded as exemplifications of the value of the social prayer-meeting. Soon as the Christian Church will generally recognize the spiritual obligation of the fellowship meeting for prayer, spiritual converse and mutual counsel, and shall bring its membership into connection with this institution, may we hope to see, not only a union of affection and fundamental principles, but a full and lasting union in the profession of all scriptural truth established. Why should not Christians aim at this higher and complete unity, and pray and labour for its attainment? It is certainly promised, and will in a future day of blessing be fully established. "*The Lord shall be King over all the earth, there shall be one Lord, and his name one.*"

It has been found beneficial to observe a concert for united prayer in behalf of ministers and office-bearers of the Church, and on account of the success of the Gospel, at an appointed hour on Saturday evening, and sometimes on Sabbath morning. This has been attended to, by agreement, by some ministers, elders, and others, for some years, and whatever may be the results to the Church generally, it has been found to be productive of singular benefits to those who have cordially taken part in the exercise. Their own spirits have been refreshed, and they have been animated and strengthened in their work, by knowing that there were beloved brethren, in various places, actuated by the same spirit, who were pleading in their behalf, and who were earnestly seeking for the revival of the Lord's work in the earth.

CALL TO CONCERT IN PRAYER BY THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE.

The late conference of the *Evangelical Alliance* assembled in Paris, issued the following invitation to united prayer. We willingly insert it, as we

regard such calls to a solemn duty as peculiarly interesting at the present time, and the objects referred to as most important :—

“Since the year 1846, when renewed efforts were made to promote a closer union between the members of the Church universal, many Christians have agreed among themselves to unite in prayer on a particular day in every week. The number of those who have adopted this godly practice has continually increased; and for several years past, the same day has witnessed Christians in different parts of the world offering up the same prayers for their brethren.

“The Paris Conference reiterates this appeal, and urges the adoption of the practice upon all their brethren. They invite all Christians to agree in presenting their prayers to the Lord on a fixed day in every week, for the following objects :—

“1. For the prosperity of the Church of Christ; especially imploring the blessing of God on missionary labours, whether home or foreign, established in those countries to which the persons whose signatures are attached to this document belong.

“2. For the union of Christians in each country, and for the union of Christians of different countries, as all constituting the different members of the same body, which is the Church of Christ.

“3. That it may please God speedily to remove those obstacles which prevent the universal extension of his kingdom, and to put an end to every system of error, idolatry, and unbelief, which opposes itself to the doctrine of the Gospel.

“4. That He would be pleased to hasten the general accomplishment of prophecy, and of those promises in particular which are made to Israel, and to the world at large through them.

“5. That all who unite in these prayers may, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, make progress in faith, in sanctification, and in spiritual peace.

“MONDAY MORNING is the time which has hitherto been observed for this united prayer.”

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		For Turkey.

VI.—THE WORLD'S WEEK OF PRAYER.

The call to Christians in all parts of the world to set apart the first week of the year, in united prayer, on prescribed subjects of fundamental interest to the Church and to nations, first originated with Protestant Missionaries in *Loodiana*, in Northern India, and was afterwards taken up by the Council of the British Organization of the Evangelical Alliance. During the last seven or eight years which the observance of this season of United Prayer has taken place throughout all countries, the happiest results have followed to those who have engaged in it—in quickening spiritual life throughout the churches—in the removal of slavery and other great obstacles to the diffusion of Christianity, and in the opening more and more of the gates of pagan and antichristian lands for the spread and triumph of the Gospel. Earnestly would we desire that the assemblies held in the World's Week of Prayer would assume, as much as possible, the form of select fellowship meetings; thus more powerful, gracious effects would, as in primitive times, follow the earnest wrestling supplications of those who are one in faith and spirit, loving the truth as it is in Jesus.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

I.—*YOUTHFUL DEVOTEDNESS.*

“ It will be readily conceded that the subject of this Volume is one of vital interest, not only to the individuals and family circles immediately concerned, but to the Church of God and to society in general. In the discussions of the present day on the subject of education, it has frequently occurred to us that, on the part of the professors of Christianity, the provisions of the domestic and ecclesiastical constitutions have been overlooked, or not brought into view in all their obligations and importance. It has often suggested itself to us as a matter of grave inquiry, whether churches baptizing the children of their members do not greatly fall short in their duty to parents, and to the children when they reach the years of instruction. Instruction in religion devolves, in the first place, and, in its early stages, on Christian parents; but it does not rest there solely and finally. To say nothing of the duty of parents, or of the culpable neglect and very perfunctory performance of it on the part of many parents, is it not the duty of the Christian pastor, and of those associated with him in the oversight of the church, not only to see that the parental duties be performed, but themselves to interfere directly in this matter, by kind and familiar dealings with young persons themselves; and in special and appropriate religious exercises, to call the attention of the church's youth to the signification and obligations of their baptism, to the concerns of their personal salvation, and to the duty of a full voluntary incorporation with the church in accession to her communion, celebration of the Lord's Supper, and practical participation in the interests of the Church of Christ? We are of opinion that this should be done, and done early, and that there is incomparably greater peril incurred on the side of delay, than on that of an early advance.

“ The small work now submitted to the public supplies a desideratum in the matter to which we have referred, and presents a fine specimen of pastoral care of the lambs of the flock. The first three chapters enter into the very spirit of the duty which we have supposed to devolve on the

Christian parent and pastor ; while those that follow exhibit, in natural order, practical instructions of great importance, demanding the early attention of youth, and, at the same time, valuable remembrancers to persons in the midst of their days, or in the evening of life. The subjects are presented in proper consecutive order ; the observations made on them are brief, pertinent, lucid, and impressive ; they are supported by appropriate Scripture authorities ; the illustrations are happy ; they are enriched with short and apt quotations from old and modern authors ; and they are enlivened with a fair proportion of anecdote ; and they all breathe the spirit of an earnest and fervent piety. Besides calling the attention of Christian parents and the young to this valuable Manual, we cordially recommend it to the Christian pastor, to the ruling elder, and to all the members of the church taking an interest, as they should, in the spiritual good of the young. While we urge the special obligation lying on parents, ecclesiastical office-bearers, and the members of congregations, to devote particular attention to the youth of the church, the reader will perceive that the Author has a strong sense of the obligation of the church to exert herself in the promotion of the interests of the kingdom of Christ at home and abroad—an obligation which she is yet only beginning to feel, and to carry into practical effect. In this connection, we regard the volume as peculiarly seasonable and valuable. In the hands of the Sabbath-school teacher, and others taking an interest in the diffusion of religious instruction, it will supply useful directions and suggestions in the performance, statedly or occasionally, of duties to the young ; and to the young themselves, if carefully and seriously perused, it cannot fail to prove a kind and faithful instructor and monitor.

“ We bid the estimable Author ‘ God speed ’ in his seasonable labours, and regard them as valuable contributions to the cause of religion, as supplementing a deficiency in popular reading, and as bringing into view a prevailing omission in Christian practice. We trust his labours will not be in vain ; and that, under the Divine blessing, his works shall be followed with increased and prayerful efforts on the part of parents and churches, for the spiritual interest of the rising race ; and that the aspects of the church, in respect of her youth, shall present greater promise, and the Redeemer see the dew of youth coming to Him in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning.”—*From a Recommendatory Preface by the late Rev. Andrew Symington, D.D., Professor of Theology.*

“ A work much needed, and ably executed. Would to heaven that thousands of our youth would peruse its pages, receive its lessons, and apply its rules ! ”—*Scottish Guardian.*

II.—*THE FELLOWSHIP PRAYER-MEETING.*

“ This is a valuable and timely publication. The subject of which it treats is one of constant and undying interest to the people of God. Every judicious effort to promote greater union among them in prayer, and the conjoint participation of Christian privileges, deserves their commendation. The advantages are, we believe, innumerable and untold, which the Church of Christ collectively, and its members individually, have derived in all ages from meetings for social prayer. We do not undervalue the public means of grace, nor would we say a word to the disparagement of the Christian ministry—Christ’s own institution for the edifying of His Body, the Church—but we, nevertheless, earnestly wish that the Christian people throughout the land were more in the habit than we fear they are, of holding private and select meetings among themselves, for the purpose of devotion and mutual edification. We have the highest authority for saying that such meetings were anciently regarded with the Lord’s special approbation (Malachi iii. 16, 17). Nor can we suppose that they would be less pleasing in His sight now, or less manifestly attended with His blessing. The history of the Church shows that they have always been attended with the happiest results.”

After presenting a number of examples in illustration, taken from the work itself, it is added—“ Instances might easily be multiplied to an almost indefinite amount. Indeed, there is no want of encouragement, either in the Word of God, or in the history of the Church ; and a more certain omen of the approach of that blessed period to which all devout minds are looking forward could not be given than the increase of a spirit of prayer, and especially of social prayer, among all classes of the people of God. We earnestly hope that this little work may tend to revive and to multiply prayer-meetings.”—*Evangelical Christendom*, vol. x. p. 108.

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